

Higher Education Governing Boards and Stakeholder Governance of  
Intercollegiate Athletics

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## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the trustees of colleges and universities in the United States. Your tireless service, often as volunteers, to institutions of higher learning is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the American system of higher education that continues to be the envy of the world.

**Abstract**

Governing boards of higher education institutions are responsible for governance actions such as appointing and evaluating the president, clarifying institutional mission, ensuring financial solvency, and preserving institutional independence. Typically not included within these responsibilities is the oversight of intercollegiate athletics (ICA), which is primarily delegated to institutional presidents. Thus, many trustees are uncertain about their role in the governance of ICA. Semi-structured interviews with 29 trustees from 23 different governing boards were conducted to provide a first-hand account of trustee perspectives on their role in providing oversight to ICA. Data were analyzed through an ad hoc approach where it was found that trustees were generally supportive of athletics while being concerned about the overemphasis compared to other aspects of institutional mission. They also had mixed viewpoints on the effectiveness of formalized board structures and processes around athletic governance, stressed the importance of trust in administrative leadership and informal consultation processes, and were challenged by the financial realities of supporting Division I athletics and the external spheres of power in college sports. The study contributed to the literature on stakeholder theory by examining how governing boards, as the stakeholders with ultimate fiduciary responsibility for institutions, provide oversight to an area of higher education with an extremely high profile and considerable financial and reputational risk. The study also contributed to the understanding of shared governance in higher education by

analyzing how governing boards effectively assert authority in a high profile area of institutional governance. Implications for policy and practice included the importance of governing boards developing clear expectations with presidents about which athletic issues require board consultation and which require formal board approval.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

The trustees of higher education governing boards are responsible for the strategic mission of their institutions, including academic prioritization, fiscal solvency, and maintenance of the public trust (Association of Governing Boards [AGB], 2010). Governing boards are one component of the shared governance of higher education institutions in which the board, president, and faculty all have specific roles in institutional decision-making (AGB, 1998). The shared governance of colleges and universities typically means the inclusion of various stakeholder groups, including trustees, administrators, and faculty, in the institutional decision-making process (Olson, 2009).

One responsibility that falls outside of the standard prerogative of Board authority, but very much inside the public consciousness, is National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) intercollegiate athletics (AGB, 2004; Knorr, 2005; Frey, 1987; Oliva, 1988; Thelin, 2008). A NCAA (2006) report outlined the ideal structure for the shared institutional governance of intercollegiate athletics as presidential control over athletic performance and operational matters, faculty oversight regarding student-athlete academic standards, and governing board involvement simply limited to certifying the institutional athletic program and supporting the chief executive. Despite trustees limited role in this recommended governance structure, governing boards are clearly a stakeholder, or a group that affects or is affected by organizational actions, in that they are often responsible

for approving items associated with athletics, including personnel actions and construction projects (AGB, 2004; Freeman & Reed, 1983).

Given that NCAA Division I<sup>1</sup> athletics is an area of higher education with a myriad of visible issues such as financial insolvency, student-athlete crime, and academic and legal scandals (Branch, 2011), in addition to a lack of clarity on board role in the governance of athletics, it is conceivable that governing board trustees might struggle with understanding their stake in athletics issues. An example of the challenges posed by intercollegiate athletics involved the Penn State University Board of Trustees. The November 11, 2011 Board of Trustees meeting was to contain discussion of residential life cost changes for Fall 2012 and a proposal to reorganize the departmental structure of the College of Agricultural Sciences (Penn State Board of Trustees, 2011). Less than a week prior to the meeting, a grand jury report revealed a child sexual abuse scandal containing allegations of assault against a former football coach and perjury against two high-ranking university officials, including the Athletics Director (Hebel & Wolverton, 2011). In the wake of the grand jury report, the Board of Trustees met in an emergency session and voted unanimously to fire President Graham Spanier and legendary football coach Joe Paterno. Instead of managing routine academic matters at the regularly scheduled meeting on November 11, the Board utilized the session to introduce an interim president and announce an

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<sup>1</sup> NCAA Division I institutions are organized into three levels - the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and institutions that do not sponsor football - which comprise 337 total member institutions (NCAA, 2011). Institutions in all three levels will be included in this study.

official investigation into the sexual abuse scandal (Ganim & Frantz, 2011; Hebel & Wolverton, 2011).

Penn State trustees described the situation as challenging because the parties responsible for the management of intercollegiate athletics, the president and the athletic director, were either suspended or terminated, and therefore unable to determine the fate of the most successful coach in the history of major college football (Thamel & Viera, 2012). The decision to fire Joe Paterno, the coach for 46 seasons with 409 career victories and who had given over \$4 million to Penn State, was made by a governing board that had no explicit authority over the management of intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2006; Thamel & Viera, 2012). Ultimately, the circumstances surrounding the sexual abuse scandal pushed the trustees into a situation in which neither policy nor precedent provided a guidebook for action.

The example from Penn State is not introduced to identify a faulty system of higher education governance or pinpoint misplaced priorities on modern college campuses. Rather, this case demonstrates that intercollegiate athletics, including the firing of a football coach, were not included in the standard duties of governing boards (AGB, 2004). The Association of Governing Boards (2010) articulates the primary responsibilities of governing boards of colleges and universities in the United States as follows:

The governing board should retain ultimate responsibility and full authority to determine the mission of the institution, in consultation with and on the advice of the president, who should consult with the faculty and

other constituents. The board is also responsible for establishing the strategic direction of the institution or system through its insistence on and participation in comprehensive, integrated institutional planning. (p. 4)

Aside from the overarching mission-related responsibility, governing boards are generally considered accountable for appointing and monitoring the chief executive, ensuring fiscal integrity, ensuring academic quality, and maintaining institutional independence from governmental control (AGB, 1998, 2007; Nason, 1980).

Despite a lack of agreement on the relative influence of athletics on a college or university, college sports are part of the higher education landscape (Brand, 2008; Lapchick, 2006; Sperber, 2001). While the athletic enterprise of any college or university is influenced by a myriad of stakeholders, including coaches, athletic directors, student-athletes, alumni, and prominent boosters, university presidents have worked to restructure the organization and place athletics more under institutional control (Thelin, 1994). In 1997, The NCAA reorganized its structure so university presidents controlled the governance of the organization (Naughton, 1997). An Executive Committee and a Board of Directors consisting solely of institutional chief executives were established (Copeland, 2009; Naughton, 1997; Smith, 2000).

Since the 1997 restructuring, the NCAA (2006) has been unequivocal in declaring, “college and university presidents and chancellors have responsibility for the operation and administration of intercollegiate athletics” (p. 41). Despite a recent restructuring that grants a minimal number of NCAA Division I Board of



Directors slots to non-presidents, the NCAA has maintained the need for presidential control of athletics (NCAA, 2014). AGB (2004) is in accord with this approach and asserts, “Boards should delegate direct responsibility for the conduct and control of the athletics department to the institution’s chief executive” (p. 4).

Although presidents are delegated the authority by governing boards to fully manage the athletic department at most NCAA Division I institutions, the visible presence of intercollegiate athletics and the financial realities of supporting major college sports make governing boards an important stakeholder in the governance of an institution’s athletic department (AGB, 2007; Knorr, 2005; Oliva, 1988). In order to examine the manner in which governing boards, as the ultimate fiduciaries of institutions, provide oversight to an area in which they have an explicitly limited stakeholder role, this study was framed from stakeholder governance (Letza, Sun, & Kirkbride, 2004; Mason, Kirkbride, & Bryde, 2007). A stakeholder approach to governance holds that organizations should serve the interests of all stakeholders who contribute resources to achieve a common purpose, not just the shareholders who seek organizational profit (Balser & McCluskey, 2005; Dent, 2008; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman & Reed, 1983; Letza et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2007; Ryan, 1990; Speckbacher, 2008; Vinten, 2001).

In the nonprofit realm of higher education, the stakeholder approach is implemented through shared governance, which is interpreted as governing boards, presidents, and faculty members, among others, sharing the responsibility

of making key institutional decisions, including those related to intercollegiate athletics (Olson, 2009). Despite recognition that governing boards are stakeholders in the governance of intercollegiate athletics, the literature on this subject is limited (AGB, 2007; Frey, 1987; Knorr, 2005; Oliva, 1988). This gap in the literature was somewhat rectified when AGB (2012) recently undertook the first comprehensive study of the manner in which governing boards were involved in intercollegiate athletics. The survey of 143 Division I institutions found that more than 75 percent of the boards surveyed have a policy on athletics, more than 67 percent delegate responsibility for athletics to the chief executive, and 52 percent have a standing committee on athletics (AGB, 2012). In the area of athletic finances, 19 percent of respondents indicated that their athletic departments are self-supporting with revenue sources other than state appropriations, student fees and tuition, and other institutional funds. In addition, the full board or board committees generally received adequate information related to athletic finances in the areas of revenues and expenditures, self-sufficiency, and the financial performance of revenue generating sports.

While the AGB report (2012) provided the first real landscape study of governing board practices, it did not venture into trustees' perspectives about the governance of athletics at their institutions. For example, although the AGB report provided understanding of how common it is for governing boards to have a policy on athletics, there remains little understanding of what the presence of a policy means to trustees as they fulfill a stakeholder role in the governance of their institutions. Similarly, although the report (AGB, 2012) provided

information on the percentage of boards that have a standing committee on athletics, the study failed to examine whether this manifestation of board oversight leads to effective governance or a lack of clarity in stakeholder responsibilities.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Framed from stakeholder theory (Letza et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2007; Ryan, 1990; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Vinten, 2001), this study examined NCAA Division I trustees' perspectives on intercollegiate athletics and how their governing boards participate in the shared governance of athletics.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are trustees' perceptions of the governance of their institutional athletic departments?
2. What are trustees' perceptions about the stake governing boards have in contributing to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics?
3. What challenges do governing boards face in contributing to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributed to the literature empirically, theoretically, and in practice. Empirically, the study built upon the work of AGB (2012) in examining the appropriate role of governing boards by providing a first-hand account of trustee viewpoints on governance issues related to intercollegiate athletics. The study also contributed to the understanding of higher education shared governance

by focusing on the role of governing boards in the oversight of athletics, which added to the existing literature on the athletic governance roles of the faculty (Kuga, 1996; Lawrence, 2009) and institutional presidents (AGB, 2004; Bouchet & Scott, 2009). In addition, this study added to the comprehension of how governing boards effectively assert authority in a high profile area of institutional governance by confirming the importance of informal consultation in implementing a shared governance system (Birnbaum, 2004; Kezar, 2005). Finally, the study contributed to stakeholder theory literature, particularly through an examination of the manner in which boards, as institutional fiduciaries, are limited as stakeholders because of the delegated authority to presidents to manage intercollegiate athletics.

The study provided several implications for governing board policy and practice as related to the governance of intercollegiate athletics. The study revealed that governing boards should engage with institutional presidents on developing clear expectations for the role of the board in providing oversight. The study also indicated that governing boards must understand that formalizing board oversight of intercollegiate athletics through athletics committees or approval of coaching contracts do not always strengthen governance practices. Finally, governing boards must ensure that board oversight of intercollegiate athletics is at the appropriate governance level and does not delve into micromanagement, thereby weakening the authority of institutional presidents.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

**Board professional.** Staff members that provide assistance to governing boards in fulfilling their governance responsibilities. This role may either be a direct report to a governing board or a dual report to a governing board and an institution's chief executive officer (Cieslak & Mersereau, 2008).

**Governing board.** The group of individuals selected, elected, or appointed to hold a higher education institution, or system of institutions, in trust for the people that it serves (Nason, 1982).

**Intercollegiate athletics.** Athletic competition that is conducted between different institutions of higher education and governed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2014a).

**Power conference.** One of the following NCAA Division I athletic conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big Twelve Conference, Pacific Twelve Conference, Southeastern Conference, which have the most resources to fund athletic programs (Gemmell, 2014).

**President.** The chief executive officer of a higher education institution that has ultimate accountability for the operation of a department of intercollegiate athletics (Hoffman, 2013; Nason, 1982).

**Private board.** A governing board of an institution of higher education that does not receive any direct operational funding from governmental sources and is populated by members that are internally perpetuated (Longanecker, 2006).

**Public single institution board.** A governing board of an institution of higher education that receives direct operational funding from governmental

sources and is populated by members that were selected, elected, or appointed through a public process (Longanecker, 2006).

**Public system board.** A governing board that is populated by members that were selected, elected, or appointed through a public process and that governs a group of higher education institutions that operate as a system within a single state, is managed by a chief executive officer, and receives direct operational funding from governmental sources (Longanecker, 2006).

**Statewide coordinating board.** A governing board that is populated by members that were selected, elected, or appointed through a public process and that governs a group of higher education institutions in a state that operate independently and receive direct operational funding from governmental sources (Longanecker, 2006).

**Trustee.** An individual member of a higher education governing board (Nason, 1982).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This chapter describes the theoretical foundation of the study, a stakeholder theory of governance. The implementation of stakeholder theory in higher education, shared governance is examined through a description of the role of governing boards. The manner in which intercollegiate athletics is typically governed is described by focusing on the responsibilities of various stakeholders and the challenges associated with, and the importance of, maintaining a competitive athletic program.

#### **A Stakeholder Theory of Governance**

The traditional approach to corporate governance has been centered on the belief that the management of a firm has the sole purpose of acting as the agent for the ownership or shareholders in order to maximize investment returns (Cooper, 2004; Freeman & Reed, 1983; Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Letza et al., 2004). In the past quarter century, a new view on corporate governance has emerged that espouses corporations serving the interests of all stakeholders, not just those of shareholders, because groups such as employees, creditors, suppliers, customers, and society-at-large are integral to the achievement of the organizational mission (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Letza, et al., 2004; Mason, et al., 2007; Ryan, 1990; Vinten, 2001). Stakeholders are all of those individuals or groups who have a “stake” in the actions of the corporation and contribute to or receive value from mission-related activities (Kangas, 2011).

Letza et al. (2004) argued that there are two primary types of stakeholder governance theories. The first is social entity theory, which justifies stakeholder interests on the basis of social justice and the belief that the corporation is an instrument for the common good. In this regard, social justice is maintained through attention to the societal effects of corporate action. The challenging part of the social entity approach to stakeholder theory is defining the common good as related to corporate performance (Argandona, 1998). The common good could be the maximization of economic values for as many stakeholders as possible or, alternatively, mutually beneficial relationships among stakeholders. Argandona (1998) defined the common good as not related to the volume of sales, profits, job creation, or the prestige of its directors, but rather the fulfillment of institutional purpose to create the conditions that will enable its members to achieve their personal goals. In higher education, the common good is often characterized as the producer of knowledge through the allocation of public and private resources to scholarship and research (Pusser, 2006).

A second approach is instrumental stakeholder theory, which values stakeholders as effective partners in improving efficiency, profitability, competition, and economic success (Letza et al., 2004). One method of implementing this approach is establishing a culture of trust and responsibility among employees within a firm so that organizational success becomes the paramount goal for all stakeholders (Jones, 1995). The instrumental approach is a mutually beneficial approach for all stakeholders because the benefits run in both directions. Each stakeholder contributes something to a corporation, but also



receives something in return (Post, Preston, & Sachs, 2002). For example, stakeholder interests are not viewed as an “ends”, but instead as an effective instrument or “means” for improving efficiency, profitability, and economic success (Letza et al., 2004; Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

While it is accepted that the term stakeholder is a contested concept, the definition in this study will draw from Freeman and Reed (1983), who wrote that a stakeholder is “any identifiable group or individual who can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives or who is affected by the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (p. 91). Despite the fact that some components of colleges and universities seek to maximize revenue, the preceding definition is appropriate for this study because of the nonprofit status of higher education institutions, which in principle are focused on a mission related to the advancement of knowledge (Rosenstone, 2003). Ryan (1990) asserted that a stake is any claimed or real interest, whether legal or moral, in any organizational undertaking. Ryan (1990) also maintained that internal stakeholders are those with formal or contractual relationships with the firm, and secondary stakeholders constitute all other actors (e.g., owners, employees, and shareholders as internal stakeholders and suppliers as secondary stakeholders).

Critics suggest that a stakeholder theory to governance is limited because of the challenge in determining the importance of stakeholder claims, whether they derive from internal or secondary sources (Charron, 2007; Phillips, 2003; Ryan, 1990; Sternberg, 1997). As the definition of stakeholder has broadened to include a wider sphere of peripheral actors, the relationship to the original firm

and the potential impact of individual stakeholders is difficult to ascertain.

Sternberg (1997) argued that a broad definition results in impractical management by writing:

Its definition as anyone who ‘intentionally or consequentially’ participates in the corporation by experiencing effects of corporate activity makes all current and future humans participants. This criterion is so broad as to nullify the scope or responsibility. (p. 13)

Sternberg also contended that accountability to all stakeholders comes at the expense of being accountable to the most important stakeholder, the corporate ownership.

The definition of stakeholders is complicated even further when discussing nonprofit organizations, like college and universities, because of the absence of the clear goal of profitability (Speckbacher, 2008). In contrast to the corporate sector, the achievement of a nonprofit organizational mission is measured by an interconnected group of stakeholders coming together and contributing resources to achieve a common purpose (Balser & McCluskey, 2005; Speckbacher, 2008). In the nonprofit higher education sector, which includes both comprehensive public and private research universities and liberal arts colleges, stakeholders may come from a wide variety of areas, including government, internal individuals and groups, and others from outside of the organization (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008). For this study, stakeholders will include those groups or individuals that contribute resources, including time, expertise, or money, to the shared governance of institutional intercollegiate

athletics. Such stakeholders include trustees, athletic administrators, presidents, faculty, students, and donors.

### **Shared Governance: Stakeholder Theory in Action**

**Shared governance in practice and theory.** Governance within higher education can be defined as the structure and process of authoritative decision-making across issues that are significant for external and internal university stakeholders (Gayle, Tewarie, & White, 2003). Externally, stakeholders such as federal and state governments, regional accreditation agencies, and business communities all have an interest in the effective governance of higher education institutions (Tierney, 2006a). On the internal side of the issue, Birnbaum (2004) argued that there are two different, yet equally valid, systems of organizational control and influence in higher education. The first system is the legal authority granted to governing boards and administrators, which is dictated by policies and procedures for organizational decision-making. The second system is the professional authority bestowed upon the faculty, which grants rights to academic decision-making in the areas in which faculty are considered experts. Based on the research of Gayle et al. (2003), it is determined that a successful merger of these two systems, and the related agreement concerning institutional mission, will often yield an effective governance model.

Power sharing and deliberations as to who makes which decisions are central to university leadership and decision-making (Bess & Dee, 2008; Gayle et al., 2003; Hirsch, 2001; Lazerson, 1997; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007). The standard approach to the power-sharing dilemma of higher education since the middle half

of the twentieth century has been a shared governance model (Hirsch, 2001).

Shared governance typically means the inclusion of various groups in the making of important decisions and allowing certain groups to retain primary responsibility for specific areas of decision-making (Olson, 2009).

Shared governance was bolstered by the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) 1967 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* (Hirsch, 2001). The AAUP *Statement* specifically delineated the roles of the governing board, the president, and the faculty in achieving a shared model for institutional decision-making. The governing board determines the strategic vision for the university and acts as the final institutional authority on matters of importance. The president is responsible for all administrative actions, and the faculty retains authority for determining educational policy (AAUP, 1967). The AAUP (1967) suggests that interdependence among governing boards, administrators, faculty, and students, and the relationship between these components must be cultivated through communication and joint planning efforts.

Given that the advancement and dissemination of knowledge is the primary mission of higher education institutions (Rosenstone, 2003), the preference for shared governance among institutions of higher education is based on the argument that stakeholders with expertise in an area, the faculty, should be a part of the governance process (Birnbaum, 2004). A second, and related, argument is that shared governance avoids a structure in which one group dominates the decision-making of a specific area, even when they might have the most expertise in that area (Simplicio, 2006). For example, faculty members have

the best foundation for determining the academic direction of an institution and often exercise their influence with primary authority through policies related to admissions, curriculum, and instruction. However, the development of formal policies and procedures within a college or university is conducted with input from administrators, and the standard approach is to have final approval of academic programs by the governing board (Gayle et al., 2003; Rhodes, 2001; Simplicio, 2006).

Birnbaum (2004) offered an analysis of governance with two separate approaches. The first is “hard” governance, which refers to the organizational structures, policies, and processes that define authority relationships. Examples of hard governance include a governing board policy that delegates specific authorities to a president, a faculty senate that formally approves academic policies and programs, or even a student government body that approves student fee allocations. The second approach is “soft” governance, which refers to the social connections and interactions within an organization that maintain group norms. An example of this form of governance is the expectation of consultation and communication between the president, board leadership, and the leaders of the faculty senate on matters of institutional importance (e.g., strategic planning, institutional budgets, hiring a football coach). Birnbaum maintained that soft governance is more effective than hard governance because the vast majority of important decisions made in higher education occur outside the formal system.

Tierney and Minor (2003) expanded on the soft governance concept by surveying institutional actors (academic administrators, faculty leadership, and

department chairs) from four-year colleges and universities to address the ways that faculty participate in governance, the effectiveness of the participation, and overall faculty attitudes about governance. The study found that confidence in institution-wide governing bodies such as faculty senates was low, but that a significant level of communication and trust occurred between faculty and administrators. In addition, respondents considered many areas as effective vehicles for carrying out shared governance, including academic departments, standing and *ad hoc* committees, faculty senates, and collective bargaining units. Tierney and Minor's (2003) study bolstered the arguments of Brown (1999) and Duderstadt (2004) that shared governance appears in many forms, not solely in the form of a faculty senate. The general sentiment of the majority of scholarly research surrounding university governance is that the most important factor in an effective shared governance system is the development of a culture of cooperation and trust (Del Favero, 2003; Gayle et al., 2003; Kaplan, 2004).

**Responsibilities of governing boards.** Utilizing a theoretical framework devoted to stakeholders, it is critical to identify the typical responsibilities of the important stakeholder group of governing boards. The United States has a unique system of higher education in which the individual institutions at the private level and individual states at the public level are granted tremendous freedom to organize and govern higher education (Kerr & Gade, 1989; Lingenfelter, 2006; Zwingle, 1980). Governing boards of private institutions are usually self-perpetuating and choose their own members, many of whom have a connection to the institution or are financial contributors (Kerr & Gade, 1989). By way of

contrast, public boards generally are appointed by a governor or legislature and are typically structured in one of the following three ways: a statewide coordinating board overseeing an entire state system; a board overseeing multiple campuses in a university system; or a board governing a single institution (Lingenfelter, 2006).

Despite the differing constitutions of private and public institutional governing boards, overall they hold similar responsibilities (AGB, 2010). Nason (1980) contends that governing boards' primary responsibilities relate to the chief executive and deal with appointing, supporting, and evaluating the president. Other responsibilities include clarifying the institution's mission, approving long-range plans, overseeing the educational program, ensuring financial solvency, preserving institutional independence, enhancing the public image, and interpreting the community to the campus (AGB, 2010; Nason, 1980).

To better understand the role of governing boards in relation to this study, it is important to examine some specific governing board responsibilities – clarifying the institutional mission, supporting the president, and ensuring financial solvency. Establishing an institutional mission is often listed as the first priority for a board, and entails describing the purpose of the institution, who it serves, and what makes the institution unique (AGB, 2007). For most institutions, the mission established by the governing board is a living statement that requires review on a regular basis (Fisher, 1991). In addition to being reviewed by the Board, educational scholars point to the importance of utilizing the mission in

governing board decisions (Carver, 1997; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1991). Chait et al. (1991) stated:

The overall or superordinate goals of a college are typically embodied in a mission statement that provides guidance and direction to all members of the campus community, from students to trustees. Effective boards understand that mission especially well and rely on it as the essential context for major decisions. Less effective boards do not. (p. 13)

Although the job of selecting the president is a major responsibility for governing boards, providing support to the president is equally critical (AGB, 2007; Fisher, 1991; Nason, 1980). A board sets a strategic direction for the institution, selects a president to implement the board's vision, and then monitors the president's ability to do so. Sample (2003) stated, "The best board of trustees is the one that recruits the best president possible, tells him what it wants, and then lets him do it while actively assisting him and monitoring his performance" (p. 16). Nason (1980) pointed out that emotional support for the president is critical, especially in times of intense criticism or institutional crisis, which are not infrequent at nearly every institution. In regard to intercollegiate athletics, it is clear that the athletic enterprise can be at odds with the academic mission and, therefore, governing board support for a president regarding athletic issues is critical (Cowen, 2005; NCAA, 2006).

Management and administration of a college or university are universally considered to be outside the domain of governing boards (de Russy, 1996; Sample, 2003). However, boards are increasingly being called upon to ensure



that universities are managed well and accountable for implementing the institutional mission (AGB, 2007). The *AGB Statement on Board Accountability* (2007) maintains that boards should be accountable for “the mission and heritage of their institutions; the transcendent values that guide and shape American higher education; the public interest and the public trust; and the legitimate and relevant interests that various constituencies represent” (p. 2). Trustees must avoid micro-managing institutions while at the same time ensuring that administrators carry out the policies of the board (Abbott, 1970; de Russy, 1996; Kearns, 1998; Sample, 2003).

An important board responsibility related to accountability is the attention paid to financial solvency (AGB, 2007; Fisher, 1991; Reed, 2001; Wellman, 2002). Public support for higher education has decreased dramatically in recent years, with state and local support per full-time equivalent student in 2010 at its lowest point in 25 years (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2012). One of the results of this public disinvestment has been a privatization model being adopted by some public universities in which the proportion of state-appropriated funds has been shifted to other sources such as tuition and fees, grants, contracts for services, and private gifts (Whitney, 2006). Private colleges, which historically have relied on tuition and endowment earnings, have been troubled by investment losses during the recession that started in 2008. In fiscal year 2009 alone, college and university endowments lost 18.7 percent of their value (Lavelle, 2010).

Whether it is the decrease of endowment resources due to investment losses or waning state support for public institutions, colleges and universities of all types and sizes are faced with substantial financial challenges, and the final budgetary decisions are vested in governing boards (Reed, 2001). AGB (2007) stated:

Among the responsibilities of governing boards, maintaining fiscal integrity is fundamental. Boards bear ultimate legal responsibility for approving the institution's annual budget and monitoring the institution's fiscal welfare. The board is the ultimate fiduciary of the institution, even though day-to-day operations are properly delegated to the administration. (p. 3)

This governance responsibility is amplified when considering the financial situation of intercollegiate athletic departments throughout the United States. The most updated data from the NCAA demonstrated that of the 120 colleges and universities at the top level of NCAA football competition, only a minimal amount were profitable from 2004 to 2012 (Fulks, 2013). Governing boards must understand the financial condition of the athletic department and the manner in which institutional funding flows to the athletic department (AGB, 2012).

**Governance of intercollegiate athletics.** As mentioned previously, the primary responsibility for the conduct and control of the athletic department is held in the office of the president (AGB, 2007; Moore, 1992). The standard approach to presidential leadership since first being proposed by the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics in 1991 has been the “one-

plus-three” model of athletic governance (Bouchet & Scott, 2009). The “one” of this approach refers to presidential authority for all aspects of the athletic department, including policies, personnel, and operations. The “three” of the model refers to academic integrity, fiscal integrity, and a standardized certification process (Bouchet & Scott, 2009; Moore, 1992). Not only has presidential control been endorsed by the NCAA at the institutional level, but since the mid-1990s the organization itself has been governed by presidents after historically being led by coaches and athletic directors (“The NCAA”, 1996).

The role of faculty, in particular the faculty athletic representative, in athletic governance is also well defined by the NCAA (Cooper, 1992). The faculty athletic representative is the faculty member assigned the formal responsibilities of representing the institution and its faculty in their relationships with the NCAA and athletic conferences (Cooper, 1992). Such responsibilities include monitoring student-athlete academic performance, advising the president and athletic director on athletic issues, and serving as a delegate to the NCAA convention (NCAA, 1998). The responsibility of the faculty as a whole is typically defined as ensuring the academic integrity of intercollegiate athletics (Bailey & Littlejohn, 1991). Former NCAA President Myles Brand (2007) summarized the role of faculty:

The single most important role of faculty members in intercollegiate athletics is establishing and maintaining academic standards. Faculty members are responsible for the creation and development of the curriculum, teaching within this curriculum, and certifying learning

through course grading and degree requirements. These responsibilities must be met with integrity. For individual faculty members, for academic institutions, and indeed for the entire enterprise of higher education, academic integrity is the central value. (p. 1)

Lawrence (2009) made several observations about faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics when he surveyed more than 2,000 faculty members at 23 institutions at the highest level of NCAA Division I, the Football Bowl Subdivision. The study found that 42 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the manner in which faculty input affects administrative decisions and 44 percent were dissatisfied with the range of faculty opinions considered by administrators when formulating institutional positions on intercollegiate athletics. In addition, approximately half of the respondents articulated that institutional decisions on intercollegiate athletics were driven more by the entertainment industry than institutional academic mission. Kuga (1996) surveyed 240 faculty members at a Big Ten conference institution and found that the majority of individuals who participated in the governance of intercollegiate athletics do so for the purposes of reforming athletic operations to make them more consistent with the academic enterprise.

A significant gap in the scholarly literature on the subject of intercollegiate athletic governance has been the stakeholder role of governing boards. Frey (1987), who compiled a summary of research related to the roles of various groups in controlling athletics at the institutional level, wrote this of the role of trustees:

There is usually a clique of trustees who seem to have a special interest in the campus athletic programs but we do not have any idea how this small group works in relation to the athletic program and to the chief administrative officers of the institution. Trustees are often members of a booster coalition that supports the athletic program and this may augment the power of the athletically-oriented trustee. Our ignorance of the role of trustees in athletic governance is a major gap in research on this topic. (p. 54)

Twenty-seven years after Frey (1987) published these words, the role of governing boards in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics remains a significant gap in the research devoted to intercollegiate athletics and higher education.

In recent years, however, there has been some attention paid to the intercollegiate athletic governance role of trustees (AGB, 2004; Knight Commission, 2001). A report of the Knight Commission (2001), which called for a closer alignment of college sports with the traditional educational values of higher education, only mentioned trustees in stating:

Presidents and trustees must work in harness – not wage the battles so commonplace today over control of the athletic enterprise. Presidents cannot act on an issue as emotional and highly visible as athletics without the unwavering public support of their boards. (p. 24)

Likewise, a report from the NCAA's Presidential Task Force on the Future of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics (2006) emphasized the institutional control of

presidents in administering athletics, while at the same time stressing the importance of governing boards supporting presidents in managing athletic operations.

AGB, working in association with the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, released its first formal statement in 2004 on the role of governing boards in dealing with athletic issues entitled, *Statement on Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics*. This statement, which was updated in 2007 and 2009 and applies most directly to governing boards of institutions with major football and basketball programs, focused on best practices and recommendations for boards in the areas of general oversight responsibilities, presidential leadership, athletics department mission, fiscal responsibility, academics and student-athlete welfare, compliance, personnel, and communications.

AGB (2012) released a comprehensive report that provided the first data on operational governance of boards of trustees in dealing with athletics. The report delivered information on the prevalence of institutional policies and committees related to athletics, whether chief executives are delegated the authority to manage the athletic department, and how governing boards deal with the challenging subjects of athletic budgets and personnel contracts. In addition, specific recommendations were made regarding governing boards maintaining ultimate accountability for athletics oversight and policy.

An important component of the governance discussion is the rationale for governing boards to desire a stakeholder role in the oversight of intercollegiate

athletics (AGB, 2012). It is not hard to imagine a trustee asking, “*Why should we care about intercollegiate athletics?*” or “*Are we placing too much of an emphasis on this one area of the organization?*” The following paragraphs examine the effect of athletics on institutional metrics and performance and explore the rationale for governing boards and trustees to maintain a stakeholder role in intercollegiate athletic governance.

From a financial perspective, the recent past has brought considerable financial challenges to higher education in the form of decreased public funding and stagnant endowment earnings, thereby resulting in budget cuts, employee layoffs and furloughs, substantial tuition increases, and higher student debt loads (Knapp & Siegel, 2009). The disparity between the institutional financial health and the growth in athletic budgets is important for governing boards to understand (AGB, 2012). As institutional budget growth lags compared to athletic department funding, a corresponding circumstance has been increased institutional resources directed to the athletic department (Fulks, 2013). In recognizing this situation for many institutions, AGB (2012) observed that boards must generate an understanding of where athletic funding originates and whether general institutional dollars are directed to athletics.

Between 2004 and 2012, the median annual revenue for institutions at the NCAA Division I FBS level, which is comprised of the largest athletic departments, increased from \$28.2 million to \$56 million, a nearly one hundred percent increase during that timeframe (Fulks, 2013). A more important metric related to athletic finances is the ability of an athletic department to be self-

sustaining, or capable of completely funding their operations from athletic sources without any institutional subsidy. The most recent data from the NCAA for 2012 demonstrates that of the 120 colleges and universities at the FBS level, only 23 were self-sustaining, with a median surplus of \$5.4 million (Fulks, 2013). For the remaining FBS level institutions that are not self-sustaining, the median deficit was \$14.6 million. Denhart and Vedder's (2010) study of 99 public institutions at the FBS level demonstrated that while subsidies as a percentage of total athletic department revenues only grew from an average of 30.21 percent in 2004-05 to 31.01 percent in 2008-09, breaking down the numbers by conference affiliation add depth to the analysis. Institutional subsidies at a percentage of total athletic revenues for 2008-09 were at 3.6 percent for the Big Ten Conference, 5.4 percent for the Southeastern Conference, and 6 percent for the Big Twelve Conference. For the Sunbelt Conference and the Mid-American Conference, both non-power conferences, the percentages were 60.7 and 72.3, respectively (Dennhart & Vedder, 2010).

Despite the fact that the majority of NCAA Division I athletic departments are not self-sustaining and require institutional funding, the pressure to increase athletic spending with the goal of enhanced success in competition is prevalent (Dunn, 2013; Hoffman, 2013; Toma, 2010). Given the financial constraints imposed on higher education institutions and the escalating costs of supporting athletics, it is important for governing boards to have an understanding of what athletic success does or does not bring to the institution (AGB, 2012). The research on the relationship between athletic success and institutional



performance metrics has yielded mixed results, with some studies (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Grimes & Chressanthi, 1994; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; McCormick & Tinsley, 1987; Mixon & Trevino, 2002; Murphy & Trandel, 1994; Toma & Cross, 1998) demonstrating a link between success in athletic competition and metrics such as alumni giving, application numbers, academic profile of incoming students, and freshmen retention rates. Other studies disputed the notion that athletic success leads to improved metrics (Fisher, 2009; Litan, Orszag, & Orszag, 2003; Staurowsky, 2003; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Turner, Meserve, & Bowen, 2001).

Despite the myriad results related to the effect of athletic success on institutional metrics, the spending associated with intercollegiate athletics continues to escalate at a greater pace than institutional spending (Denhart & Vedder, 2010; Fulks, 2013). Given that governing boards are ultimately responsible for the financial health and strategic direction of institutions, they must, at the very least, seek to understand the manner in which athletics is governed and administered at their institutions and engage in the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of supporting a Division I athletic program (AGB, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework Rationale**

A stakeholder theory of governance (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Letza et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2007; Ryan, 1990; Vinten, 2001) was an appropriate model for examining the role of governing boards in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level. Disregarding athletics, typically

universities at the NCAA Division I level have unique organizational missions that distinguish them from for-profit corporations. A stakeholder theory (Vinten, 2001) best described the governance approach in the nonprofit and public sectors, where there are no shareholders and the specific beneficiaries of effective organizational performance are numerous. The stakeholder approach most appropriate for my proposed study was that of Argadona (1998), who argued that organizational performance should be measured on the fulfillment of the common good of enabling organizational members to achieve their personal goals. Rather than focusing on single goals such as profitability or shareholder return, institutions of higher education work toward the multi-varied mission of teaching, research, and outreach, which encompasses numerous individual stakeholder goals (AGB, 2007).

In the same regard, the principle of shared governance (Hirsch, 2001; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007) was a suitable model for this study. Not only is shared governance the standard model in higher education, but the general approach of governing intercollegiate athletics involves the participation of multiple stakeholders, including presidents and other administrators, athletic department officials, compliance officers, and faculty (Cooper, 1992; Lapchick, 2006; Moore, 1992). Although presidents are granted authority to provide institutional control for intercollegiate athletics, the advisory role of faculty athletic committees and the management responsibilities of athletic departments combine to provide the overall governance structure (NCAA, 2006; Lapchick, 2006; Thelin, 2008). Determining the appropriate role of governing boards in this area, especially when

considering that trustees have the ultimate responsibility for institutional academic integrity and financial solvency, is a critical component to the shared governance paradigm.

An example of how stakeholder theory can be applied to intercollegiate athletics is the academic performance of student-athletes. Stakeholders such as student-athletes typically desire to do well in the classroom in order to stay eligible, which is also a primary concern of coaches (Boyd, 2012). Athletic administrators generally aim to create a setting where academic excellence can be attained, and therefore often accommodate student-athletes with services not available to the general student population (Thamel, 2006). As the NCAA has imposed more penalties in recent years on departments for poor academic performance, the impetus is present for athletic administrators to seek academic improvement (Wieberg, 2008). The faculty are interested in maintaining academic integrity, protecting institutional reputation and ensuring that student-athletes are held to the same standards as all other students (Brand, 2006). Externally, fans and boosters, especially in the high profile sports of football and men's basketball, sometimes care only about whether teams are winning and not mired in scandals (Duderstadt, 2000; Sperber, 2000).

The oversight of student-athlete academic performance is a practical application of shared governance and a logical connection to stakeholder theory. Faculty advisory committees for athletics are typically involved directly in such issues as student-athlete eligibility, participation standards, and student-athlete degree progress (Cooper, 1992; NCAA, 1998; Lapchick, 2006). This application

of the shared governance model provides protection from coaches and administrators simply working to defend their own *stakes* in student-athlete academic performance. Although presidents have institutional control over athletics, the shared governance model with faculty governing the academic component is the standard (Brand, 2006). The dissertation study added to existing literature by examining the role, or *stake*, that governing boards have in contributing to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework used to construct the study. A stakeholder theory of governance was introduced as the foundational theory for the study. Shared governance, which constitutes a stakeholder approach to governance in higher education, was summarized in order to profile the role of governing boards in institutional governance. The oversight structures surrounding intercollegiate athletics were profiled to explain the role of presidents and faculty and explore the previously minimal discussion on the role of boards. Finally, the chapter presented a rationale for applying a stakeholder theory of governance to a study on the role of governing boards in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

This chapter describes the methods used for the study. A qualitative research approach was implemented through the use of semi-structured interviews. The role of the researcher, development of the sample, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness are explained. The chapter also describes a pilot study and how it influenced the design of the study.

#### **Qualitative Design**

The study employed a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2008). Basic qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena through a variety of methods of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Research of this manner generally assumes that individuals have an active role in the construction of social phenomena and that research methods capture this activity (Boeije, 2010). Qualitative research is typically undertaken to step beyond the known to better understand the perspectives of participants in order to add to the empirical knowledge of a subject (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

An important attribute of qualitative research relatable to this study was the ability to examine an issue in depth without constraint to predetermined categories of inquiry (Patton, 1990). The study's purpose was to provide an opportunity for trustees to convey their viewpoints on the governance of athletics at their institutions. A quantitative approach to addressing this purpose might include surveying trustees from different institutions using a Likert Scale about how strongly they agree with viewpoints on athletic governance (Carifio & Perla,

2008). The responses and resulting analysis from those predetermined questions would be insightful, but the depth of the study would be contained solely within the survey, thereby limiting the emergence of new ideas and inquiry. Qualitative research is typically reflexive in that the researcher is granted the opportunity to reflect upon the research process and allow for the inquiry to go in a natural direction without constraint to predetermined processes (Bailey, 2007).

The strongest rationale for engaging in qualitative research for this study was the nature of the research questions (Morse, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The literature on the topic provides limited understanding of trustee perspectives of the role of intercollegiate athletics on their campuses and the manner in which governing boards should contribute to athletic governance (AGB, 2012). For example, AGB (2012) documented that more than 75 percent of surveyed governing boards of NCAA Division I institutions had an athletics oversight policy. Without additional inquiry through qualitative research, there is no capacity for understanding what the presence of an athletics policy means to trustees as they carry out their fiduciary responsibilities. The research questions for this study could not adequately have been answered without an open-ended investigation that provided an opportunity for first-hand accounts and detailed discussion that extends beyond basic statistical inquiry.

### **Researcher's Role**

The personal and professional elements of any research study are important to acknowledge before commencement of the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Marshall and Rossman (2011) argued the success of qualitative

research depends on the researcher possessing such interpersonal skills as awareness of organizational politics and sensitivity to human interaction. The importance of the researcher is magnified in interview studies because the interviewer is the primary instrument in the creation of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). There are two primary areas of consideration related to the role of the researcher in qualitative research, technical and interpersonal (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Technical considerations.** The technical aspects of the researcher's role involve the deployment of the researcher's time and resources, negotiating entry to the study sample, and ensuring ethical compliance (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Marshall and Rossman (2011) observed that the researcher's time devoted to the study often varies in intensiveness and extensiveness, or degrees to which the researcher is in the study setting on a daily basis. While the study was conducted completely by the researcher, including the scheduling of interviews, the collection of data, and data analysis, I would argue that the study was neither overly intensive nor extensive in time commitment due to the limitations of my full-time employment as a higher education administrator and data collection methods that consisted solely of telephone interviews with participants.

Entry to the participants was provided by board professionals acting as formal gatekeepers for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Seidman, 1991). The gatekeepers determined potential interviewees, ascertained interest, and facilitated initial communication with the participants. From an ethical standpoint, this study was conducted in compliance with the rules of the Institutional Review

Board (IRB) of the University of Minnesota and approved by the IRB as an exempt study (Reference Number 1305E33022).

**Interpersonal considerations.** The interpersonal element of the researcher's role involves building trust with the study participants, maintaining good rapport as the study progresses, and respecting norms of reciprocity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). One way that trust was established with participants was through continual assurance that their participation would remain entirely confidential throughout the process. Not only was confidentiality highlighted in initial communications to board professionals and gatekeepers, it was emphasized in the opening statement of each interview and when transcripts were sent to participants for their review. The development of rapport with participants was fostered, in both email communications and recorded interviews, by attempting to relate to their governance role by communicating my professional experience working for both a governing board and a president. The continuity of rapport was established through opportunities for participant involvement after the initial interview. This included an invitation to review and revise the transcripts and to provide comments and observations on an executive summary of findings.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) observed that because people are giving of their time to be interviewed or participate in a qualitative study in other ways, the researcher should plan to reciprocate. Participants were notified that they would receive no compensation for their participation, and no expectations were established except their involvement in a telephone interview. The only tangible



benefit offered to the participants was an opportunity to receive a copy of the dissertation upon completion. Seidman (1991) argued that often the only reciprocity that can be offered to interview participants is a sincere interest in their experiences, paying close attention to their words, and honoring their observations in an accurate way when presenting the study findings. Given the limited ability to provide tangible benefits to the interview participants outside of the completed study, I focused on the approach offered by Seidman and attempted to respect the time they provided to me by accurately capturing and appropriately using their perspectives in the study.

**Positionality.** At the University of Minnesota, I worked as a board professional in the Office of the Board of Regents for over seven years and an administrator in the Office of the President for over two years. I have considerable understanding of issues related to higher education governance. I have spent extensive time interacting with trustees both at the University of Minnesota and at AGB national conferences. These experiences have contributed to my understanding of the organizational and interpersonal politics of governing boards and my comfort level of interacting with people in positions of authority.

My work at the University of Minnesota in both the Office of the Board of Regents and the Office of the President has involved extensive interaction with the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics on policy issues. For example, I have assisted on athletic department presentations to the Board of Regents, helped facilitate the hiring of an athletic director, and engaged with a University of Minnesota campus on options related to NCAA membership. In addition, I am a

former student-athlete at the NCAA Division III level and have been an avid follower of college sports for nearly my entire life. Although my personal background has led to an understanding of the issues, challenges, and intense public interest in intercollegiate athletics, I do acknowledge that these experiences possibly affected how data were collected and analyzed. For example, my professional experiences and related exposure to the intercollegiate athletics issues at my institution certainly influenced how I interacted with trustees from other universities, which issues I chose to address in the interviews, and how the data were analyzed.

The researcher has a scientific responsibility to the academic profession to make certain that the research is conducted in an effective, controlled, and verifiable manner (Kvale, 1996). My academic coursework in research methods and independent studies conducted with my dissertation advisor on implementing a qualitative research project provided an understanding of the methods that I employed and analysis completed. In addition, the completion of a pilot study demonstrated the effectiveness of an interview approach in gathering and analyzing data from trustees.

### **Sample**

The sample was developed purposively, which entails development of a sample based specific criteria determined by the researcher (Gobo, 2004) related to addressing the research purpose and related questions. The sample for this study was built according a central characteristic, being a trustee of a governing board overseeing one or more NCAA Division I institutions. The process of

recruiting trustees was developed primarily through my professional experience and knowledge that access to governing board members is typically coordinated through board professionals. In this regard, the selection process utilized formal gatekeepers in facilitating access to trustees (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Seidman, 1991). Board professionals were identified through searches of institutional websites and contacted via email to ascertain if they knew of any trustees on their boards that might be willing to participate in the study (see Appendix B). I started with emailing board professionals for all governing boards overseeing institutions from the power conferences, followed by emailing board professionals from other categories of boards, making certain to include both public and private boards from all three categories of NCAA Division I participation.

Sample size was based solely on saturation of information, which occurs when an interviewer hears the same information and nothing new is gleaned from the responses (Akerstrom, Jacobsson, & Wasterfors, 2004; Boeije, 2010; Seidman, 1991). For this study, the wide variety of perspectives conveyed by trustees crested after reaching a sample size of 29 participants, thereby leading to the assumption that saturation had occurred. However, the condition of saturation may have been correlated with a limited collection of information during the interviews. The average length of interview was only 29 minutes, thereby leading to the conclusion that the data collection was potentially scant on content. This study limitation could have resulted from a variety of factors, including the inexperience of the researcher in conducting interviews or the time limitations of

the interview participants. Regardless of whether the interviews contained enough content, the completion of 29 interviews led to the conclusion that a sufficient sample size had been achieved because no additional themes or ideas were being communicated.

Table 1 summarizes the sample of 29 interviewees, including trustees from an assortment of different types of institutions with varying levels of experience. Trustees served on four types of boards including public system boards, public single institution boards, private boards, and statewide coordinating boards. Nineteen trustees were from public boards, with all of them being publicly elected or appointed. The ten trustees from private boards were all internally appointed. The sample comprised of three females and 26 males, the length of service ranged from less than one year to more than 25 years, and nine had served as a board chair. Nine trustees oversaw institutions from multiple levels of Division I, four oversaw institutions that did not sponsor football, and 22 oversaw at least one institution from the FBS level, with 13 of those coming from power conferences. The sample ultimately provided satisfactory representation of several categories, including the type of governing board, power conference status, or service as chair on the board. However, it is acknowledged that the sample considerably underrepresented female trustees as only three women were interviewed.

*Table 1: Participant Characteristics*

Number	Gender	Selection	Length of service	Type of board	Division I level	Power conference institutions	Service as chair
1	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Statewide coordinating board	I, I-FBS, & I-FCS	No	Yes

2	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Public system board	I, I-FBS, & I-FCS	Yes	No
3	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Public system board	I & I-FBS	Yes	No
4	Male	Publicly appointed	More than 10 years	Public system board	I & I-FBS	Yes	No
5	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Public system board	I, I-FBS, & I-FCS	Yes	No
6	Male	Publicly appointed	More than 10 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	Yes	Yes
7	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I-FBS	Yes	Yes
8	Male	Publicly elected	More than 10 years	Public system board	I & I-FBS	Yes	Yes
9	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Statewide coordinating board	I & I-FBS	Yes	Yes
10	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	No	No
11	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Statewide coordinating board	I-FBS & I-FCS	Yes	No
12	Male	Internally appointed	0-5 years	Private board	I	No	No
13	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I-FCS	No	Yes
14	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	No	No
15	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I	No	No
16	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	No	No
17	Male	Internally appointed	5-10 years	Private board	I-FBS	Yes	Yes
18	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	No	No
19	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Statewide coordinating board	I-FBS & I-FCS	No	No
20	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I	No	No
21	Female	Internally appointed	0-5 years	Private board	I-FCS	No	No
22	Female	Internally appointed	0-5 years	Private board	I	No	No
23	Male	Publicly appointed	5-10 years	Public single institution board	I-FCS	No	No
24	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Public single institution	I-FBS	Yes	No

				board			
25	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I-FBS	No	No
26	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	No	No
27	Male	Internally appointed	More than 10 years	Private board	I-FBS	Yes	Yes
28	Male	Publicly appointed	0-5 years	Statewide coordinating board	I-FBS	No	No
29	Female	Publicly elected	0-5 years	Public single institution board	I-FBS	Yes	Yes

### Pilot Study

The interview guide was influenced by a pilot study undertaken in 2009 to examine trustee viewpoints on intercollegiate athletics. The main goals of the research were as follows: (1) review the process for enlisting interview participants, conducting interviews, and collecting and analyzing data; (2) determine the adequacy of the interview guide; and (3) assert whether the proposed study would sufficiently address the proposed purpose statement and respective research questions. The pilot study was aimed to investigate how governing board trustees viewed the governance of intercollegiate athletics at their institutions.

Given study participants would include members of governing boards of NCAA Division I institutions, the pilot study used purposive sampling to identify three former trustees of an institution that fit into this classification, the University of Minnesota. The criteria for sample selection included my familiarity with the interviewees during my role as a board professional for the University of Minnesota Board of Regents and because of the belief that they would represent a

wide variety of opinions and experiences related to intercollegiate athletics.

Three potential participants were contacted directly to ascertain their willingness to participate in the interviews, ensure them of confidentiality of the process, and explain the interview procedures. All three participants accepted the invitation.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using an interview guide (Seidman, 1991). The interview questions were developed in accordance with literature on the topics of board governance and intercollegiate athletics, and my experience working for the University of Minnesota Board of Regents and understanding the manner in which that board provided oversight to athletics. The interview guide was organized to focus initially on questions about general perspectives on intercollegiate athletics (e.g., *What are your general observations about athletics at your institution and in American higher education?*), then moving on to the public nature of athletics (e.g., *How often did members of the public want to talk to you about athletics versus other university issues?*), before concluding with more specific questions about how their board provided oversight to athletics (e.g., *Did you feel comfortable with the board's role regarding coaching hires and contract approval?*).

Data were collected through digitally recorded, semi-structured phone interviews that lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Phone interviewing (Shuy, 2003) was selected as the recording method because of the likelihood that interviews in the proposed study would be conducted in this manner. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the data was coded using an open coding process, which entailed a careful reading of the data to develop segments of

similar subjects (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010). The initial codes included visibility of athletics, board involvement, presidential engagement, academics, budgets, coaches, and contracts. The open coding process was followed by axial coding, which involved combining the initial codes into the larger categories (Boeije, 2010). The axial codes developed were public interest, board practices, presidential leadership, and the uniqueness of athletics. Through the open and axial coding process, the following three primary themes emerged: (1) the high profile nature of intercollegiate athletics among external constituencies; (2) presidential engagement and limited board role; and (3) the role of the governing board in defining the institutional significance of intercollegiate athletics.

When examining the purpose statement of the study, the most prominent component was providing trustees the opportunity to express their viewpoints on the topic of intercollegiate athletics. The pilot study demonstrated that trustees would most likely be willing to not only express their viewpoints, but also to discuss an area of considerable concern in higher education. The first theme identified in the pilot study was the high profile nature of intercollegiate athletics, confirmed that trustees acknowledged the unique institutional place of athletics and therefore suggested that interview questions would yield relevant and in-depth responses that would address the research question on trustees' general viewpoints on athletics.

The second theme identified related to the importance of presidential engagement on athletic matters and maintaining a limited role of the board in governing athletics. This confirmed that trustees would be willing to delve into



the details of informal and formal governance structures and the importance of maintaining appropriate stakeholder roles. The interview guide, therefore, was revised to include a line of questioning on the stakeholder role of the board and trustee recommendations for how athletics should be governed. The third identified theme noted that although there was often a goal to treat athletics as any other component of the institution in policy and procedures, the trustees observed that athletics is institutionally distinct due to its high profile nature. Subsequently, documenting this observation influenced the design of the study by partially focusing the interview questions on governing board oversight mechanisms for athletics as compared to other institutional units.

The pilot study also influenced the phrasing of questions for the interview guide. Direct questions were deemed to be appropriate in order to seek out specific thoughts on certain issues such as board roles in athletic governance. Therefore, the interview guide was developed to include such direct questions as, *“What role does the board play in athletic governance at your institution?”* However, it was also determined that the most content-rich answers from the pilot study participants came from open-ended questions that allowed for detailed exploration of relevant topics. Hence, phrasing a question on general viewpoints on athletics by stating *“Tell me about your general thoughts on intercollegiate athletics,”* yielded greater content than questions defined to specific areas of athletics or athletic governance such as *“Do you think boards should approve the hiring of head coaches?”* Ultimately, the interview guide was developed with the

intent of including both broad-based observational questions and inquiries into specific governance areas.

### **Data Collection**

**Interview guide.** Based on the pilot study an interview guide (See appendix A) was developed and used to facilitate the semi-structured interviews. Seidman (1991) argued an interview guide is developed to maintain a basic structure for each interview and to provide opportunities for interviewees to be prompted. An interview guide typically develops over the course of a project, initially being constructed based on the literature and questions that would address the study's purpose and related research questions, and then evolves depending on pilot testing, conversations with fellow researchers, and the initial interviews conducted as part of the study (Rapley, 2004).

Patton (1990) maintained that using an interview guide ensures the best use of limited time and allows for a more systematic analysis of an issue across a wide spectrum of participants. Interview guides for semi-structured interviews should contain an outline of topics to be covered, with questions or areas listed for each topic (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) pointed out that the interviewer must judge, based on their own interpretation of the value of the progression of questions, how closely to follow an interview guide's sequencing or whether to veer off track to pursue any individual responses. Bailey (2007) elaborated on this approach by writing, "The flow of the interview, rather than the order in a guide, determines when and how a question is asked" (p. 100). The questions developed for the interviews were primarily open-ended in order to stimulate an

extended sharing of information (Bailey, 2007). However, the questions were short, simple, and free from academic jargon so as not to confuse or intimidate the participants (Bailey, 2007; Kvale, 1996). For example, a basic and short question posed to the participants was, “*How often do you talk about athletic issues with your president outside of meetings?*”

The interview guide was organized into two sections. The first section was composed of background and demographic questions (e.g., “*Tell me about your experience on the board of trustees?*”). The second section of the interview guide, titled *Institutional Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics*, was developed to adequately answer the research questions and consisted of the following questions:

1. What are your general views on intercollegiate athletics?
2. What is the appropriate role of intercollegiate athletics on your campus or campuses?
3. What role does the board play in governing intercollegiate athletics at your institution?
4. How should intercollegiate athletics be governed at your institution?
5. What role should the board play in the governance of intercollegiate athletics?
6. What are the challenges experienced by the board in the governance of intercollegiate athletics at your institution?

The first two questions related to research question number one, which attempted to gather trustee perspectives on intercollegiate athletics in general and the role the athletic department plays on their campuses. The third, fourth, and fifth interview questions applied directly to research question two, which sought

to understand the *stake*, or appropriate role, that governing boards have in contributing to intercollegiate athletic governance. The sixth interview question applied to research question five because inquiring about trustee challenges yielded information about general governance perceptions and trustees' roles as stakeholders.

The questions in the second section of the interview guide were open-ended and allowed for dialogue between the researcher and participants (Bailey, 2007). In order to ensure that important topics were covered during the interviews, the interview guide contained a series of specific topics for the interviewer to address during conversations. For example, question five, I thought it was important to gain an understanding of whether a trustee or governing board were challenged by such notable issues as major revenue sports and their exclusive status, coaching contracts, and athletic department finances.

**Semi-structured interviews.** The interview format used was semi-structured (Kvale, 1996). This type of interview allowed for flexibility regarding how an interview was administered, but still contained the interview to a predetermined set of parameters (Bailey, 2007; Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews are usually scheduled in advance, last a fixed amount of time, and contain dialogue and conversation between the interviewer and subject, rather than just questioning (Bailey, 2007). Kvale (1996) described this type of interviewing as a conversation that has a structure and a purpose to “obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 6).

**Data collection procedures.** Participant interviews were scheduled in advance through phone or email correspondence. After determining the lead board professional through research of institutional websites, an email was sent to the individual inquiring about the participation of trustees in my study (see Appendix B). Not all initial emails were responded to, but due to time constraints and a belief that the frequency of responses was leading to a sufficient sample size, there was no follow up sent to nonresponsive recipients. Replies to the initial email indicated an immediate willingness of trustee participation, a commitment to inquire with trustees about participation, a rejection of the request, or questions about the study. The most frequent questions were about length of time commitment or the timeframe for completing the interviews. Some correspondence required several emails or phone calls with board professionals to confirm the participation of trustees. In a minimal amount of cases, lengthy correspondence led to them ultimately declining participation or unresponsiveness.

Upon confirmation of trustee willingness to participate, board professionals were asked to provide contact information for either the trustee directly or an assistant. An email message was then sent to the trustee, or the trustee's assistant, with information on how to schedule the interview and a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix C). The dates and times for the interviews were then arranged via email or phone, depending upon the preferences of the participant.

I began each interview by reading a statement regarding the purpose of the interview, how the interview data would be used, how the information will be maintained, and the confidentiality procedures to be utilized. Informed consent for each participant was then verbally confirmed (see Appendix A). After receiving consent, the recording was started and the interviews commenced. All interviews were digitally recorded with a cellular phone application due to the fact that trustees were not located in one place, thereby limiting time and cost constraints. Shuy (2003) acknowledged both advantages and disadvantages to telephone interviewing, observing that telephone interviewing produces greater cost-efficiency and significantly less logistical challenges. As illustrated in Table 2, the interviews ranged in length from 16 minutes to 45 minutes and varied in the number of questions asked. The average length of interview was 29 minutes.

Each interview was framed around the central questions included in the interview guide under the category of *Institutional Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics* (see Appendix A). However, such conditions as the willingness of the interviewee to elaborate in response to follow up questions or the tendency of some participants to wander between several topics in a single response dictated the flow of each interview. For example, Trustee number one had the shortest interview of the study due to an unwillingness to elaborate on any answers even when prompted with several follow up questions. On the contrary, Trustee number 16 was only asked eight questions in a moderate length interview due to the fact that the responses, while long and meandering, adequately covered the topics associated with the questions in the interview guide. Though not

successful in every situation, the probing questions that were most effective were those that simply asked for elaboration on a topic already covered by a trustee (e.g., *You have mentioned the importance of trust in your president. Can you elaborate on what that means to you?*).

*Table 2: Interview Summaries*

Number	Interview length	General observations
1	16:04	Answers were extremely brief; responses focused on his public system board having very little interaction with athletic issues; challenging interview due to the brevity of answers, even when follow-up questions were asked.
2	40:32	Moderate-length answers; focused responses on governance and the work of his public system board in providing oversight to athletics.
3	31:59	Trustee devoted significant time to answering each question in depth; focus placed on the trustee's past experiences with athletics as a student-athlete and fan.
4	26:06	In-depth responses; answers were often stream-of-consciousness monologue; examples of board interaction with athletics to illustrate viewpoints on athletics.
5	23:40	Focused on governance issues and the lack of influence the board had on certain athletic issues; focused comments on changing of conferences for one of the institutions governed by his public system board.
6	23:44	Responses were typically brief; focused on such things as the history of the institution's relatively young athletic program and the board's deference to the president on athletic matters.
7	31:32	Responses were thorough and focused on the roles of the board and the administration in providing oversight to athletics; Particular attention paid the differences between athletic governance at public and private institutions.
8	25:50	Served on his public system board for more than twenty-five years; focused responses on the lessons learned from his tenure; responses were thorough; importance of communication and consultation.
9	44:43	Candid reflection on the trustee's time as a member of the board with a focus on anecdotes from his term as chair of the public system board; focused on the perceived overemphasis on athletics and a wariness of the board being too involved in athletic matters.
10	25:45	Comments were focused on the challenges associated with maintaining intercollegiate athletics at a non-power conference institution, with greater attention paid to the operational elements of athletics rather than governance issues.
11	26:23	Contained long responses that wandered between several subjects; responses focused on importance of the public leadership of the board given the high profile nature of intercollegiate athletics.
12	21:04	Relatively brief answers to most questions; focused on the role of the board's athletics committee and the board's general level of interest in athletic issues.
13	35:22	Responses were comprehensive for most questions; comments focused on the specific ways the board interacted with athletics, including the athletics committee and consultation with the president.
14	23:03	Comprehensive answers, but took an extremely activist stance in his responses, arguing for much greater involvement for trustees in athletic governance.
15	22:05	Brief answers to the majority of questions; primary focus on the limited role of the board in contributing to the governance of the private institution's low profile athletic department.
16	26:54	Responses focused on the financial challenges of maintaining a Division I athletic department at the trustee's non-power conference institution; minimal attention was paid to the governance role of the board.
17	23:32	Responses were thorough and comprehensively answered the questions; most responses focused on the private board and the role the board's athletic committee played in working with the administration to address athletic issues.

18	32:16	Majority of the interview devoted to the role of the board and the importance of communication and consultation with the president on athletic issues.
19	33:52	Responses at times meandered between several subjects, but generally focused on the role that the board and individual trustees play in providing athletic oversight; observed that being a public system board with multiple institutions yields challenges.
20	29:19	Majority of responses focused on the unique challenges associated with athletics at a non-power conference, low profile private institution; devoted time to financial challenges of supporting athletics and the lack of involvement by the board on athletic issues.
21	32:13	Responses cast a critical eye on governance structures and practices at her private institution, including frustration about the operations of her board's athletics committee.
22	42:45	Non-linear interview due to trustee responses often veering off-course from the intended questions; framed answers around her long-time experience with the institution, even before becoming a trustee, as an alumnus, student-athlete, and booster.
23	30:37	Responses comprehensively answered the questions, with attention paid to the operations of the athletics committee and the importance of formal board oversight of intercollegiate athletics.
24	25:27	Focused remarks on his role as the board's liaison to the athletic department and the implementation of this formal oversight mechanism; considerable attention devoted to the rationale for the board creating the liaison role.
25	30:34	Framed responses around the athletic oversight experiences of his private board; chronicled the manner in which the board undertook a comprehensive self-study of whether to maintain Division I athletics.
26	26:27	Thorough responses with attention paid to governance matters such as relations between the board and the president and the importance of informal consultation.
27	34:21	Responses focused on experience as chair of his power conference private board; attention was given to the board focusing on governance responsibilities and avoiding micromanagement.
28	24:17	Brief but direct answers to all questions; focused several comments on the structural changes made by his public system board to attempt to adequately address athletic matters.
29	36:38	Lengthy, but direct, answers to the majority of questions; focused several remarks on the challenges of attempting to provide oversight to a high profile, wealthy athletic program from a power conference.

After the interviews were digitally recorded, they were transferred to a computer as MP3 files. I then transcribed each interview verbatim. Before data analysis occurred, the interviewees were sent a copy of the transcript to allow them the opportunity to verify the content and clarify sentences. Eighteen of 28 interviewees (one trustee waived the ability to review the transcript) responded with confirmation of accuracy or revisions, primarily to clarify their statements. There were no interviewees that substantially added language to their transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of analyzing data in a qualitative manner is deliberative and guided by the research questions (Boeije, 2010). Analysis is conducted to uncover



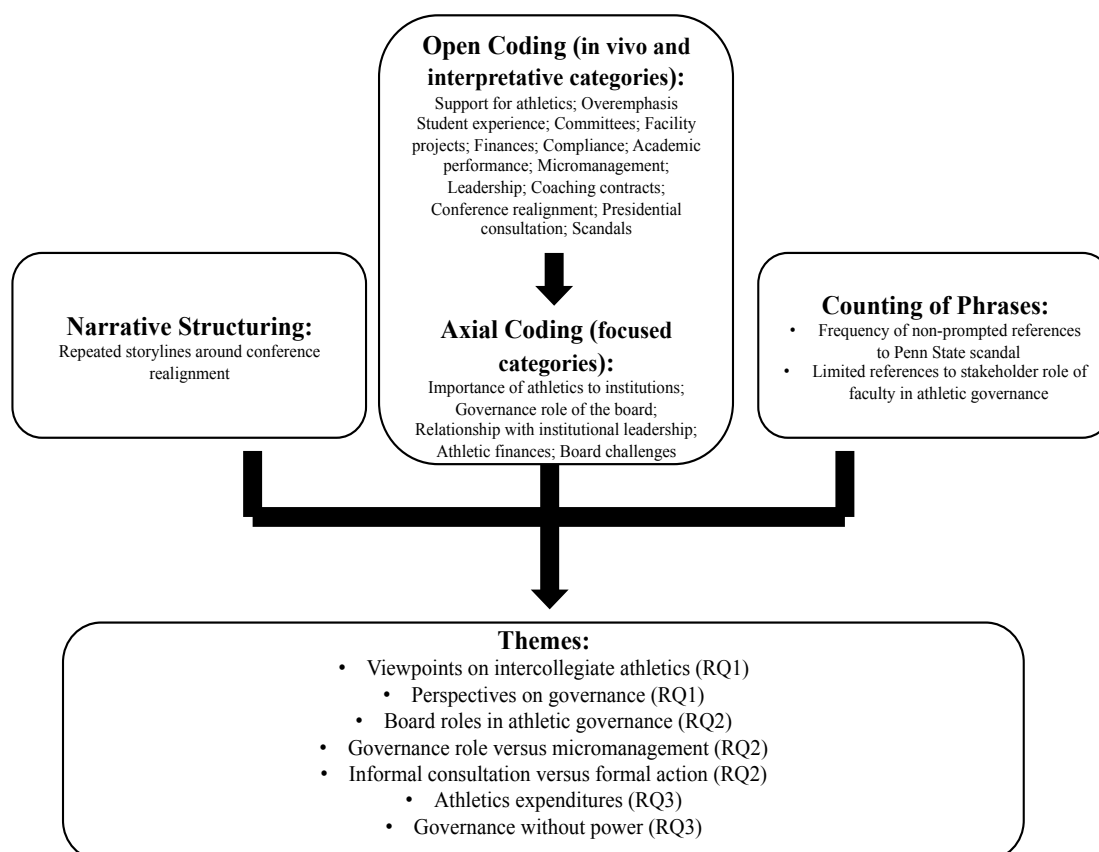
patterns, themes, and categories in order to make judgments about the meanings and importance of the data (Patton, 1990). The specific analysis method that was implemented for this study was the *ad hoc* approach illustrated by Kvale (1996) as a combination of techniques utilized to generate meaning from interview text. Kvale (1996) observed that a researcher undertaking this approach will use a variety of sophisticated textual and quantitative techniques and may:

read the interviews through and get an overall impression, then go back to specific passages, perhaps make some quantifications like counting statements indicating different attitudes to a phenomenon, make deeper interpretations of different statements, cast parts of the interview into a narrative, work out metaphors to capture the material, attempt a visualization of the findings in flow diagrams, and so on. (p. 203)

The techniques utilized for this study were coding, both through open and axial methods, noting the frequency of words or phrases, and narrative structuring (Boeije, 2010; Kvale, 1996). The culmination of these methods was visualized in a flow diagram in Figure 1. Coding is an analytical exercise of taking a large amount of raw data and segmenting it in a conceptual way (Bailey, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). For this study, coding was implemented as a two-part process, with open coding conducted as the first step (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010). Boeije (2010) described open coding as the careful reading of all collected data and subsequent division into fragments, or categories dealing with similar subject material, and then labeled with a code through color

coding, marking with dots, or writing in the margins or through use of a coding software program.

*Figure 1: Data Analysis – Ad Hoc Methods*



The codes used in the open coding phase were derived as either in vivo codes, or labels attached to actual words used by the participants, or conceptual labels based on my interpretation of what was being said (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The open codes were generated through an initial reading of the transcripts, and then confirmed, subtracted from, or added to after a second reading that was undertaken line by line to determine the beginning and ending of each concept. For example, there were multiple interviews where the initial in vivo code for a segment was solely leadership, but upon the second reading, such

codes as consultation and micromanagement were added to the analysis. The open codes identified were support for athletics, overemphasis, student experience, committees, facility projects, finances, compliance, academic performance, micromanagement, leadership, coaching contracts, conference realignment, presidential consultation, and scandals.

The second phase of the coding process was to employ axial coding, which further reduced the data by reassessing the initial open codes, both in vivo and interpretive, to combine them into larger categories (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010). While open coding was implemented to fragment the data, axial coding ignited the process of connecting the data in a conceptual manner (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The development of a larger category such as governance role of the board through axial coding was conducted with the explicit purpose of assessing the data to correspond with the research questions. For example, open codes such as committees, coaching contracts, and micromanagement were combined through axial coding into this more comprehensive governance category, which matched up with the second research question (*What are trustees' perceptions about the stake governing boards have in contributing to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics?*). Through axial coding, the following categories were identified: importance of athletics to institutions; governance role of the board; relationship with institutional leadership; athletic finances; and board challenges.

A separate component of the *ad hoc methods* analysis approach (Kvale, 1996) stemmed from the initial readings of the transcripts during the coding

process. The counting of phrases used in the interviews was incorporated into the data analysis due to the fact that I observed repeated references to the Penn State scandal. As referenced, an in vivo code identified during open coding was scandals, in which each Penn State reference was included. However, the frequency of this reference provided cause for the supplemental quantitative inquiry of counting the references to Penn State. Despite the fact that neither Penn State nor other athletic scandals were referenced in any interview questions, the fact that over one third of the participants referenced Penn State was determined to be an important finding.

A second case of counting phrases also resulted from the coding process. Although there was substantive discussion on the stakeholder roles of the board and the president as related to athletics, it was observed that very few trustees mentioned faculty. Therefore, the number of instances that trustees referenced the stakeholder role of faculty in athletic governance was also inventoried, with only slightly greater than one-third of trustees acknowledging faculty as stakeholders. This contributed to the determination that trustees often had a lack of understanding of athletic governance roles.

Narrative structuring (Bailey, 2007; Kvale, 1996) was also used to assess the meanings surrounding a specific issue faced by boards and how the issue was managed. Kvale (1996) explains that narrative structuring, “focuses on the stories told during an interview and works out their structures and their plots....a narrative analysis may attempt to create a coherent story out of the many happenings reported through-out an interview” (p. 192). Although an in vivo code was

created during open coding on conference realignment, it was observed that each trustee's reference to this issue was more of a storytelling exercise about their institutional experience rather than a general description of board governance. Therefore, trustee comments on conference realignment were evaluated not in isolation, but rather as an exercise to interpret how boards dealt with an issue causing major upheaval in the college athletics landscape. It was observed that a trustee referencing conference realignment was generally not a reflection on that specific issue, but instead told a narrative story of how their board's policy, practices, and culture influenced institutional decisions.

As detailed in Figure 1, the final component of data analysis was the identification of over-arching themes generated from the ad hoc methods of open and axial coding, the counting of phrases, and narrative structuring (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2008; Kvale, 1996). This identification was conducted with the explicit intent of addressing the research questions and communicating the findings. A total of seven themes were identified for the three research questions and are described in chapters five and six. The themes identified for research question one included general support for athletics, concerns about overemphasis, and unfamiliarity with athletic governance. For research question two, the themes range from board roles in the athletic governance to informal consultation versus formal action. Finally, the themes for research question three were challenges around athletic expenditures and governance without power. The findings in chapters five and six are communicated by describing the general findings through contextual analysis of the data and the use of quotations presented in

context of the analysis to illustrate the various themes (Kvale, 1996). Quotations were selected according to theme relevance, the brevity of statement, and the effectiveness of capturing trustee sentiment on a general issue. Quotations from all 29 trustees are used in the findings chapters.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln & Guba (1985) argued that trustworthiness is met through the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is defined by Lincoln and Guba as the presence of activities that increase the probability that plausible findings will be produced. Credibility may be established through several methods, including prolonged engagement in a subject area, external checks on the inquiry process, the refining of hypotheses as the research process evolves, checking preliminary findings against archived data, or consultation with original sources on the preliminary findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

One strategy recommended to ensure credibility is peer debriefing, which is the process of exposing the inquiry to a disinterested peer in order to explore aspects of the study that might otherwise exist only in the researcher's mind (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This activity meets Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of an external check on the inquiry process. Debriefing can be done through discussion or having a peer conduct a parallel analysis of the data. In order to recruit a sufficient sample size of willing participants for this study, it was determined that complete confidentiality for the participants was necessary. Governing board trustees are quite often either public officials or prominent

alumni of their institutions, and therefore potential participants had a compelling reason to require confidentiality of their participation. Given that it can be difficult to conceal an interviewee's identity when using quotes (Boeije, 2010), it was determined for this study that only the researcher could be involved in the analysis of data, thereby eliminating the implementation of peer debriefing.

Given the critical need for guaranteeing complete confidentiality, the alternative method of member-checking was utilized to ensure credibility (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 1991). Member-checking, which corresponds with Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) credibility method of communication of preliminary findings with original sources, involves the process of presenting the findings to participants to determine if they recognize the findings and judge them to be accurate according to their own experience. Lincoln and Guba argued that member-checking is the most important technique to be employed in establishing credibility due to the fact that it gives study participants the opportunity to review, react, revise, and add to the findings in a direct manner. For this study, all trustees were given the opportunity to review and revise the transcripts of their interviews in order to ensure accuracy of the data. In addition, all trustees with whom I had maintained direct email contact were given the opportunity to review and reflect on a summary of the findings. Twenty-one trustees were asked to review the findings summary, and eleven responded with comments. All of the respondents communicated that they determined the findings to be recognizable and accurate in accordance with their transcripts and reflections on the subject.

Transferability is the ability to conduct a similar study and achieve similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that transferability to other potential studies is impossible to assert and can only be judged by other researchers. However, they wrote, “It is, in summary, not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). The transferability of this study, therefore, was enhanced through a detailed description of the methods utilized in the study, including the development of the sample, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, the findings are comprehensively documented in Chapters Four and Five, thereby providing future researchers a well-defined pathway for replicating the study or supplementing with further research.

Dependability is established by demonstrating that the techniques utilized in a study can be conducted in a quality manner with replicable results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Strategies for verifying dependability range from an auditing process undertaken by an external observer to a replication of the study by either a partner researcher or an impartial observer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2003). One way that dependability for this study was confirmed was through the completion of the pilot study, which demonstrated the reliability of the methods employed and created a replicable process. The pilot study data collection and data analysis was implemented effectively, thereby providing a replicable model for this study. Although this study has not yet been replicated, dependability is confirmed through the likelihood of replication if a subsequent study is repeated



in the same context with the same techniques (Shenton, 2003). In addition to providing the contextual background and rationale for this study, there is thorough documentation of the sample and how it was developed. For example, the study provided detailed information on the participants, how they were recruited, and the manner of interaction before, during, and after the data collection. The study also included a complete description of the methods utilized at all stages of the research inquiry, thereby ensuring a dependable model for study replication.

Finally, confirmability is recognized when others determine the findings of a study are sensible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). For this study, confirmability was established through the demonstration of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The procedures utilized at all stages of the process, including subject recruitment and participation negotiation, interview content and techniques, data analysis, and follow-up communication with participants were comprehensively documented in the study. One additional strategy was through the preservation of an audit trail, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted was the primary technique for establishing confirmability. The ability to conduct a confirmability audit is enhanced through the comprehensive maintenance of such study elements as raw data and procedural information about the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All correspondence, digital records, field notes, and transcripts have been maintained to provide an audit trail for this study.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the research design used in this study. The study employed a form of qualitative methodology through the implementation of semi-structured interviews of 29 trustees that govern NCAA Division I institutions. The chapter described the role of the researcher in the study and the effect of a pilot study on the study design. After each interview was transcribed, the data was analyzed using an ad hoc approach that included coding procedures, counting of phrases, and narrative analysis to identify multiple themes for each research question. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the level to which the study attained trustworthiness.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Perspectives on Athletics and Governance**

This study intended to explore the stake that trustees of higher education governing boards have in the governance of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics at their institutions. Chapters four and five present the findings organized around the three research questions. This chapter focuses and profiles trustees' broad perceptions of intercollegiate athletics and athletic governance from an institutional and national perspective. The next chapter will document trustee viewpoints on the stakeholder governance of athletics and roles assumed by governing boards, as well as documenting the challenges of overseeing a Division I athletic department.

This chapter summarizes the findings that trustees were generally supportive of athletics at their institutions and that trustee connections to athletics as former student-athletes correlated with their level of support for athletics. Trustees expressed concern about the disproportionate emphasis placed on athletics compared to other institutional priorities, while at the same time expressing confidence in the manner in which athletics is governed. Finally, trustees voiced concern with athletic scandals such as Penn State and the related effects on institutions. To ensure confidentiality, the findings and discussion will refer to trustees by the number assigned to them in Table 3.1.

#### **Viewpoints on intercollegiate athletics**

**Support for athletics.** Consistent across all segments of the sample, trustees perceived that college athletics is an important social component of

American universities and were particularly supportive of the role that athletics plays on their campuses. In answering questions about the role of athletics nationally and on their campuses, several trustees commented that college athletics is a unifying factor in campus life by bringing people together as fans to express pride in an institutional entity. In particular, they argued that all students, not just student-athletes, benefit from the social interactions that stem from experiencing intercollegiate athletics as a fan. This opinion seemed to impart that attending athletic events and supporting institutional teams enhance the overall student life experience by creating opportunities for stress relief and formalized socialization. Trustee number 13, a private institution board member from a university that has achieved notable athletic success in recent years, reflected on the importance of athletics to student life by stating:

Athletics plays a big role in universities. Not from an educational standpoint, but more from socialization and blowing off steam....It's a bonding time and makes their memories of their college experience more fulfilled. If you were just going to school and going to the library and coming home and that was it and then you got a job, I don't know if you'd think fondly of your college years.

In addition to the preceding quote, three other trustees specifically mentioned the role of athletics in enhancing campus life for the general student population. Trustee number 7, a board member from a private institution with a prominent athletic department, observed, "I think they're an important and exciting part of the university experience and university life." Trustee number 8,

a public system board trustee with one power conference institution, echoed the importance of athletics to the student experience by commenting, “There’s no doubt that success in athletics is good for morale. It increases school spirit. It’s a rallying point for students from all different backgrounds and different perspectives.” Interestingly, all the trustees that focused on the school spirit, student attendance, and socialization aspects of athletics were from institutions that have had achieved recent success in athletic competition in either of the two prominent sports of football or men’s basketball. Given the limited scope of the study, it would be impossible to contend that only students from institutions with prominent athletic programs benefit from the aforementioned characteristics of intercollegiate athletics, however it is a noteworthy finding.

The viewpoint that college athletics can have a positive impact on the experience of the general student body is supported by some research (Mixon & Trevino, 2005; Schurr & Wittig, 1993). Schurr and Wittig (1993) found attendance at athletic events was positively correlated with retention and four-year graduation rates. Mixon and Trevino’s (2005) study of 81 Division I schools that sponsored football at the FBS level demonstrated that intercollegiate athletics served students by providing an outlet from the psychic challenges of college life, thereby enhancing graduation and retention rates. There are critiques of the impact of athletics on the student experience, with Sperber (2000) arguing that the student sub-culture around college athletics is associated with negative aspects of student life including binge drinking and gambling. Nelson, Lenk, Xuan, and Wechsler’s (2010) analysis of a national survey of university students and

administrators found that intercollegiate athletics was correlated with permissive drinking environments and tailgating parties, thereby adding to concerns about the socialization aspect of athletics. Wechsler and Davenport (1997) found that students who were involved in athletics, which could entail either participation or attendance, were more likely to engage in binge drinking than students not involved in athletics.

Toma (2010) observed that the benefits of college athletic programs are typically attributed to improvements in such areas as admissions, fundraising, and institutional profile and branding. Interestingly, only two trustees cited these factors as for supporting athletics. Trustee number 4 responded to a question on the appropriate role of athletics on his campus by observing, “There’s no question that athletics have a positive role to play in the recruitment of students in general. I think they give you a brand.” Trustee number 17 noted that athletics made his private institution visible by commenting, “The podium of major college sports league affiliation really ends up being the lens through which America looks at your school. They can find you.” The infrequency of comments such as this could be because the phrasing of the question on general perspectives on athletics typically used the words “on your campus,” which may have led trustees to think about internal factors important to current students rather than external issues such as recruiting and development.

**Trustee connections to athletics.** Questions regarding general perspectives on athletics revealed that self-identification by trustees of being a former student-athlete shaped their viewpoints about athletics. The nine trustees

that identified themselves as former student-athletes were from all types of institutions, both from within and outside of power conferences. Those trustees were universally supportive of athletics on their campuses and fondly recollected on their experiences. Former student-athlete trustees covered such topics as the importance of athletics in providing socialization, the life lessons that athletics imparts, and the inherent pride in competing for one's institution. The former student-athletes typically focused on the positive experience of being a student-athlete in terms of socialization with a community of teammates, thereby lessening the isolation that sometimes occurs for college students. As noted in Table 3.2, Trustee number 22 spent considerable time discussing her connections to her institutional athletic department, including as a student-athlete. In response to a question regarding the place of athletics on her campus, the trustee stated:

My participation and my philosophy from being an athlete is that athletics is really critical....I felt that when I was on campus, I would not have been introduced to other people on campus if I hadn't been part of a team. I probably would have only known the people that were studying what I was studying.

Trustee 14 observed that regardless of the specific sport, competing in athletics yielded considerable institutional pride through the experience of representing one's institution. He stated, "The discipline and rigor and excitement competing for your school translates down from football and men's basketball all the way down to rowing. I think it's a valuable experience."

Three of the trustees who were student-athletes noted the unique perspective that the status brought to their board participation. Trustee number three observed that the fact he was the only former student-athlete on his board made him the most qualified to serve in the role of board liaison to the athletic department. Trustees number 14 and number 18, incidentally from the same public single institution board, both acknowledged that their student-athlete experience gave them different perspectives than their colleagues and enhanced their positive viewpoints on athletics. When asked about his general perspectives on athletics, trustee number 18 acknowledged the distinction of his athletic background in stating, “I’m going to come at this a bit differently having been a student-athlete. I certainly know the benefits of athletic involvement and having a successful athletic program at any institution.” As noted in Table 3.2, trustee number 14 repeatedly focused on the board being active in athletic governance, which appeared to stem from a belief that his experience as a student-athlete should lead to an enhanced role.

Concerns about institutional and national overemphasis of athletics will be covered in the next section, but a corollary was found in regard to trustees who did not have experience as a student-athlete. Several of the trustees who expressed concerns about athletics being stressed over other institutional priorities did not self-identify themselves as former student-athletes. Trustee number 21, who did not have a background in intercollegiate athletics prior to becoming a board member, illustrated the concerned viewpoint by observing about the national landscape of college sports, “I think athletics needs to be part of a



balanced life. I do think that in the United States, we as a society give too much credence to athletes and place them on pedestals versus scientists and teachers.”

The findings provide no clear answer as to why trustees who were not former student-athletes were more focused on an outsized role of athletics, but it could be speculated that a good experience as a student-athlete might result in a bias toward positive perspectives on athletics at the institutions they govern.

Trustees are stakeholders in the governance of intercollegiate athletics due to their membership in a body retaining institutional fiduciary responsibility, but the fact that several trustees voluntarily added a second level of stakeholder investment as former student-athletes is a unique component of stakeholder governance (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011; Post et al., 2002). Regardless of whether a specific stakeholder group is viewed as legitimate within the governance structure, organizations must recognize that stakeholders may emerge through self-identification (Post et al., 2012). The self-identification by trustees of a specific stakeholder role as former student-athletes is consistent with the Crane and Ruebottom’s (2011) viewpoint that the traditional economic and contractual bases for stakeholder legitimization fail to account for the societal affiliations that potential stakeholders may have. While the fact that trustees self-identified as student-athletes may not have officially altered their official governing board role, it did add a layer of stakeholder involvement through their social identity as a former participant in intercollegiate athletics.

Former student-athlete and booster perspectives about positive aspects of intercollegiate athletics are supported in the literature (McDearmon, 2013; Schurr

& Wittig, 1993; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphey, 2001). Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphey (2001) observed participation in intercollegiate athletics imparted several important lessons that should be transferred to the non student-athlete student body, including working toward a common goal, sharing adversity, and recognizing the importance of diverse contributions to a team effort. Schurr and Wittig (1993) found competing as a student-athlete yielded benefits such as enhanced academic performance and higher graduation rates when compared with the rest of the student body.

French (2004) provided a sharp critique of the notion that participation in athletics leads to enhanced character development. The author observed that despite the fact that universities claim to focus on developing well-rounded graduates, there is little evidence that they actually do. French noted that athletics is a part of this charade, writing:

Is it ironic or an indicator of how out of sync are the intercollegiate athletic programs that their administrators and coaches use the rhetoric of character education and appeal to the myth that participation in athletics ingrains virtues and values that are transferable to off-the-field life experiences to defend their programs when their university has, in practice long since abandoned such expectations for students in the curricula it requires in its myriad of majors. (p. 59)

Although this study did not explore the connection between trustee perspectives and demographic components such as race or gender, Lapchick (2011) provided another critique of the positive aspects of student-athlete participation by

demonstrating that the experience for all student-athletes may not be the same in documenting that white men's basketball players from teams competing in the NCAA tournament had a graduation rate of 91 percent, while the rate for African-American men's players was only 59 percent.

**Concerns about overemphasis.** Despite overwhelming support for the role of athletics on their campuses, trustees also expressed varying levels of concern that athletics were overemphasized and treated differently, both at the national level and on their own campuses. Responses were generally vague about this perceived overemphasis, but assertions such as “it's gotten out of control” or “there's too much money in college athletics” were stated on a regular basis. Concerns seemed to be centered on the belief that athletics were driven by such interests as television exposure and financial incentives, rather than the traditional academic and research purposes of higher education.

A common response from trustees was akin to, “I support college sports on our campus, but.....” Trustees observed that athletics was an important and visible component of a university, but it should not take precedence over the academic mission and that the board should not spend a disproportionate time dealing with athletics issues. When asked about his perceptions of athletics on his campus, trustee number 27, a private institution board member, took the opportunity to focus more on academics than athletics. The trustee stated, “The point is we are very competitive academically as well as athletically. I think sports are a big, big part of our identity, but they're not the defining identity.” In noting

that recent athletic success had enhanced the profile of her institution, trustee number 21 observed that the institution was struggling with this trend by stating:

The discussions have been held at faculty and staff levels. Each of the different colleges are talking about it, and the governing board, and we are being very careful to not let athletics be the thing for which our university is known. We do not want to get to that point. The academics are too important.

Trustees number 27 and 21 both added to their expressions of concern about athletics being prioritized over academics by explaining that their boards and institutions attempt to focus on the academic performance of student-athletes as much as athletic accomplishment.

Although general support for athletics was present among all categories of trustees, the most negative statements about an overemphasis on athletics were primarily confined to trustees from either institutions that were not from power conferences or public statewide coordinating boards. That non-power conference trustees expressed concerns about overemphasis was not surprising given the financial challenges associated with supporting Division I athletics and keeping up with the power conference institutions in the arms race of college athletics. The connection between financing Division I athletics at a non-power conference institution and the board being challenged by athletic governance is explored further in Chapter Five.

Of the 16 trustees that served on boards overseeing no power conference institutions, 13 directly communicated concerns about athletics being

overemphasized, typically in response to questions about viewpoints on athletics from a national perspective. In contrasting his experience as a student-athlete in the 1960s compared to intercollegiate athletics today, trustee number 25, who served on a private board from a non-power conference, observed, “There was nowhere near the intensity level on athletics when I was in school....At many institutions, it’s gotten out of control. It’s the tail wagging the dog from an institutional standpoint, but nobody knows how to control it.”

Public statewide coordinating board trustees expressing concern about the overemphasis on athletics could be reflective of the fact that those boards were more focused on overall academic governance and less tied to the athletic prowess of a specific institution. Trustee number 19, whose board oversaw four non-power conference institutions, observed that some trustees identified more with some institutions depending on geography, but the lack of one dominant institution resulted in the board focusing less on athletics than on academic and operational matters. As noted in Table 3.2, Trustee number one’s interview was characterized by extreme brevity of answers. However, the statewide coordinating board member whose board oversees six institutions competing at the Division I level was the only trustee to overtly criticize athletics, which he attributed to not only an overemphasis on athletics, but also to a lack of connection with the institutional athletic departments. Trustee number one stated, “I have a lot of criticism of collegiate athletics. I think there’s way too much emphasis put on intercollegiate athletics at our universities.” When asked about how his board interacts with athletics, the trustee responded, “It gets back to the

size of our board, and we simply cannot get involved at that level in the individual campuses.”

Concern about overemphasis on athletics reflects public opinion that college sports more resembled professional rather than amateur sports, college coaches pay was out of proportion, and commercial interests took precedence over academic interests (Knight Commission, 2006). University administrators and faculty have also expressed concern about the focus on athletics. Taylor et al. (2011) found that college presidents voiced considerable concerns about athletics, with only 25 percent of college presidents at four-year public universities and 39 percent of presidents at four-year, private universities believing intercollegiate athletics had a positive impact on their institutions. The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2007) also found that faculty at NCAA Division I FBS institutions believed athletics was structurally separate from the academic enterprise and driven by the entertainment industry rather than institutional academic mission.

Despite the literature confirming that a variety of stakeholders believed there to be an overemphasis on athletics, this study showed that trustees were generally supportive of the role of intercollegiate athletics on their campuses and not interested in dramatically altering the profile of college sports. This could be due to the fact that trustees either do not feel powerful enough or are not as exposed to the daily operational and academic challenges associated with intercollegiate athletics as are presidents and faculty. Responses to the overemphasis on athletics through alternative approaches to athletic management

or oversight were not directly stated by trustees, though the following section's summation of perspectives on governance and Chapter five's synopsis of the stakeholder roles assumed by boards provide information on the various ways boards deal with the complexity of athletic governance.

### **Perspectives on Governance**

**Importance of trust in leadership.** The primary reason for confidence in the governance of athletics identified by trustees was trust in institutional leadership. In most cases, the leadership was referenced as presidents, though in some situations trustees referred to other administrators such as athletic directors. Trust in leaders meant that trustees had confidence that leaders would appropriately deal with athletic issues and equally as important, make certain that the board was informed of important athletic matters. From a stakeholder governance perspective, the importance of a culture of trust between the board and the president corresponds with Greenwood and Van Buren's (2010) position that trustworthiness within an organization is a fundamental aspect of positive relationships between organizational stakeholders.

Due to the institutional responsibility for athletics assumed by presidents, trustees emphasized how important it was to have presidents engaged in the oversight of intercollegiate athletics, which typically entailed the day-to-day administration of the athletic department. Multiple trustees observed that presidents should not delegate oversight of athletics to athletic directors. Presidents must be present during athletic discussions in order to facilitate board confidence in athletic management. Trustees repeatedly stated that there must be

communication between the board, particularly board leadership, and the president so that all parties have the same understanding of issues of importance in athletics. In discussing the communication between the board and the president regarding athletic issues, trustee number 27 observed:

The relationship is very important, because if the board sees athletics one way and the president sees it another, that's a recipe for major conflict. So rapport, communication, and mutual understanding is really critical for the success of the board, success of the administration, and success of the athletic program.

Trustee number seven, who had served as the chair of his private board, observed that the presence of confidential quarterly meetings between the president and the full board and weekly meetings between the president and board leadership provided a foundation for communication and trust on athletic issues. The trustee explained, "I think the open communication process, which provide opportunities for the president to proactively communicate on issues of concern and in the headlines, and for trustees to ask about anything they want to, has resulted in trustees generally feeling well-informed." The observation about confidential meetings allowing for greater communication may correlate with the ability of a private board to conduct more business in closed session than a public board. Chapter five will explore in greater depth whether private boards are afforded more opportunity to communicate openly with the president on athletic matters, thereby establishing a greater sense of trust in leadership.



In addition to the importance of confidence in the president's understanding of athletics, trustees commented on the value of having a president that believed in the mission of athletics. Trustee number 13, in particular, observed that presidents who place a high priority on athletic and academic performance were better served at dealing with the inherent tension between athletics and the academic side of institutions. The trustee described the appropriate leadership in athletics from his current president by contrasting it with the experience of the institution's previous president. He stated:

We have a new president, and we feel very good about how he feels about athletics. Our previous president was very academic and athletics to him was just sidelight....Our current president understands the value of athletics and the mix between athletics and academics and what it does to our exposure and reputation. But he also has a huge mission of academics first, and he's been able to communicate that to the faculty, and the relationship is a lot better.

Only one trustee expressed criticism of his institutional president and the relationship with the board regarding athletics. Trustee 14, who advocated for a greater board role in athletic oversight as noted in Table 3.2, expressed the opinion that the president was threatened by board involvement in athletics. When asked if his board gets too involved in the operations of athletics, he maintained that it has occurred due to a lack of cooperation between the board and the president, thereby leading to a lack of trust. Trustee number 14 observed:

From my perspective, presidents can't have it both ways. And I think our president tries to do that...Our president doesn't work collaboratively with us. He'll give us the impression of collaboration, like a recent athletic director search when he ended up letting us, because we insisted, interview the candidates. He'll just do what he wants. It's kind of a mixed message he sends.

The importance of confidence in institutional leadership in all aspects of higher education management is supported by the literature on governing boards (AGB, 2012; Hirsch, 2001; Nason, 1982). Nason (1982) succinctly argued, "Institutions will not thrive unless the board has confidence in the president" (p. 87). From an athletic perspective, this confidence is typically stated as the unequivocal policy statement that the chief executive officer is in control of athletics (AGB, 2012). Trustees observed that confidence is bred through presidents keeping the board informed on important athletics issues. This viewpoint corresponds with Hirsch's (2001) observation that the role of administration is to provide the board with information needed for oversight, translate policies into programmatic initiatives, and ensure that initiatives are brought to implementation.

The study supports literature on governing board best practices regarding the importance of communication flow between boards and presidents on athletic issues (AGB, 2012; NCAA, 2006), but also lends credence to the belief that boards and presidents must strike the right balance regarding academics and athletics. The academic enterprise has historically been at odds with the priorities

of intercollegiate athletics, thereby creating opportunities for tension between governing boards and presidents (Gerdy, 1997; Thelin, 1994). A divide between athletics and an institution's academic community may heighten the risk for over-commercialization and athletic compliance issues in athletics (Knight Commission, 2000; NCAA, 2006). While trustees repeatedly stressed the importance of trusting presidents to manage athletics, comments were often partnered with an affirmation of academics maintaining a priority status.

Despite trustees placing a high level of importance on trusting their institutional leadership to manage athletics in a proper manner and keep the board informed of important matters, it could be questioned whether an extreme amount of confidence and delegated authority is appropriate when considering the high profile nature of intercollegiate athletics. AGB (2012) succinctly stated that while presidents are clearly delegated the daily management of athletics, "The governing board is ultimately accountable for athletics policy and oversight and should fulfill this fiduciary responsibility" (p. 6). While having trust in a president to appropriately manage athletics does not entail that a board is shirking its fiduciary responsibility, chapter five will further explore the relationship between the president and the board through discussions of micromanagement, formal board authority, and informal consultation.

From a stakeholder perspective, the study lends some support to the position that prioritization among stakeholder claims may occur (Ryan, 1990). Trustee comments reflecting deference to presidents implied an ordering of stakeholder input on athletic issues. For example, trustees conveyed the sense

that they do not necessarily need to be involved in the daily decisions around the management of athletics, but they would expect to be provided information regarding issues deemed important by institutional leadership. An important contribution to the literature on stakeholder theory is the suggestion emanating from the study that the majority of trustees, despite ultimate institutional fiduciary responsibility resting with governing boards, were willing to defer authority and take a lower ranking stakeholder role. Regarding the content of stakeholder issues rather than the ranking of the stakeholders themselves, affirmation of the precedence of academics over athletics supports a ranking of stakeholder claims.

**Unfamiliarity with athletic governance.** Despite most trustees possessing a high level of confidence in the governance of athletics, multiple trustees appeared to have a lack of understanding of the various levels of institutional governance structures. Some trustees expressed little understanding of the roles of the various stakeholders in the governance of their institutional athletic departments, particularly faculty members. Only ten of the 29 trustees interviewed mentioned faculty members in discussing the governance of athletics. Of those ten trustees, only trustee number 24, who served as his board's athletic liaison, devoted any time discussing the faculty oversight role with athletics. The typical response was simply an acknowledgement of a faculty role without any details provided.

The comments of two trustees stand out regarding a perceived lack of knowledge about the faculty role in athletic governance. Trustee number 8, who had served on his public system board for over 25 years and had just completed a

four-year term as the chair of the board's athletic committee responded to a question on understanding of institutional athletic oversight by responding, "I think there is faculty athletic committee." Trustee number 17 chaired his board's athletics committee, yet admitted, "Faculty, I'm not exactly sure how to define their role in athletics." Although the most likely reason for this lack of understanding is an absence of education for trustees on stakeholder roles, an additional culprit of ignorance of faculty involvement in athletic governance might be due to the fact that faculty-driven reform efforts, both at the institutional level and by national coalitions, have achieved minimal results (Ridpath, 2008). New concerns have arisen that the faculty voice will be lessened by the latest round of NCAA governance restructuring, which seeks to provide greater autonomy to the power conference, thereby potentially resulting in a weakened role for faculty at an institutional level (Berkowitz, 2014).

One explanation for an overall unacquaintedness with the various stakeholder roles in athletic governance could be in the inherent nature of board membership. Trustees acknowledged that unfamiliarity with athletic governance structures and important athletic issues is often a byproduct of a board governance system that delegates the responsibility for various issues to standing committees, thereby limiting topical exposure to a limited group of trustees. While this issue could be present on all types of boards, trustees that made explicit comments about a lack of understanding of certain areas of governance were exclusively from private boards. Due to a greater average number of board members, private

boards often rely on committees to fulfill fiduciary responsibilities rather than through full board meetings or committees of the whole (AGB, 2010b).

Another issue potentially hampering trustee understandings of athletic governance is the transitional nature of board membership. While length of term and term limits vary between both public and private boards, keeping trustees adequately informed can be challenging due to continual rotation of membership. A board that heard a comprehensive presentation on athletic governance five years ago might now have a membership that has changed by half. In responding to a question on the comfort level of the board as related to athletic governance, trustee number 7 commented:

The biggest issue is that we have trustees who have been on the board for one and two years and trustees who have been on the board for ten and eleven years. We may have done major review of topics like compliance for the whole board, and it's been delegated to a committee. So someone who just came on to the board may not feel on top of those issues.

Reflecting on the prior section regarding trustee concerns about overemphasis of athletics and the related prioritization of academics over athletics, it is interesting that so few trustees mentioned the role of faculty in the governance of athletics. Faculty, as discussed in Chapter Two, retain authority for determining educational policy in a shared governance system (AAUP, 1967). Regarding athletics, the responsibility of the faculty is typically defined as ensuring the academic integrity of the athletic program (Bailey & Littlejohn, 1991; Brand 2007). A conclusion can be drawn that some trustees offered blatant

contradictions by mentioning the importance of academics while at the same time failing to account for the role of the faculty. This suggests that trustees generally fail to understand the manner in which academic oversight of athletics is typically implemented.

Inherent to a successful stakeholder governance structure is an attention to the roles and viewpoints of all organizational stakeholders (Charron, 2007; Hasnas, 2013). Therefore, perceived unfamiliarity of athletic governance by trustees, an important stakeholder group in themselves, leads to a questioning of whether stakeholder governance can be effectively implemented when boards are ignorant of governance roles. As discussed, trustworthiness between stakeholders groups is essential to effective governance (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2010), and a lack of awareness of roles and responsibilities among various groups certainly does not display a high level of trust. In illustrating the importance of obligation of deference to all stakeholders, Hasnas (2013) wrote, “managers of an organization do not have an exclusive fiduciary responsibility to any one stakeholder group, but are obligated to ensure that the value created by the organization is distributed among all the normative stakeholders of the organization” (p. 55).

**The impact of athletic scandals.** Despite a general sense of confidence in the institutional governance of athletics, trustees consistently expressed a concern with scandals in college athletics. A particular focus was directed toward the recent sexual abuse scandal at Penn State University (Freeh, 2012). Although I did not ask specific questions about Penn State or any other athletic scandal,

twelve of the 29 trustees interviewed mentioned Penn State in their responses. While the Penn State scandal had remained in the news cycle of college athletics when the interviews were conducted, the fact that nearly one-third of trustees commented on Penn State without prompting was deemed to be an important finding and indicated a preoccupation with avoidance of scandals.

The focus on Penn State in trustee responses was found among trustees from all types of boards and governance experience level. However, eight of the twelve trustees that mentioned the Penn State scandal were from public boards. This could be attributed to the fact that public board trustees are not only accountable to their institutions, but also to the greater public in ensuring that situations such as the Penn State scandal are avoided. Trustees from public boards are also more likely to associate with the Penn State trustees and the challenges they faced in that situation. Trustee number 16, who serves on a public single institution board, responded to a general question on board oversight of athletics by stating, “I don’t envy Penn State, with everything going on there, and the position the trustees were in. I felt sympathetic to the trustees.”

Multiple trustees referenced Penn State as an acknowledgement that athletics can be a huge liability in terms of institutional risk, most considerably to the financial well-being and institutional reputation. Other trustees referencing Penn State did so by expressing fear that athletic departments become too powerful and not bound to institutional compliance rules and regulations. When discussing how his views on athletics have changed since becoming a board



member, trustee number six noted the importance of ethics in the oversight of athletics. The trustee commented:

You have to have proper tone and commitment to ethical behavior and compliance in athletics that you have across the rest of the university system. And god forbid you end up with the type of things that have happened at Penn State and elsewhere. Where something becomes so good and so great that it can't have any ultimate supervision.

Trustee number 29, who served on a public single institution board, reflected the comments of the previous trustee on what she has learned as a trustee. She observed, "As a trustee, that's one of my greatest worries and fears, that athletics becomes so powerful that we lose our transparency, we protect poor behavior, all those things that happened at Penn State."

Two trustees observed that the fallout from the Penn State scandal provided an impetus to assess board oversight of athletics and identify any potential governance problems. In discussing the importance of formal board oversight of athletics, trustee number 23, a member of a public board, observed, "When you get a Penn State report, our president and his team take the recommendations and give us a state of the union on where we stand and incremental recommendations or actions they might take." Trustee number 12 referenced the specific conditions of the Penn State scandal and the resulting self-examination of institutional policies by stating, "Citing Penn State, we had to go back and look at what we were doing, hopefully so we could prevent that from happening. What was our oversight about not only who was reporting to who, but

also protecting people who might report something?” Colleges and universities throughout the United States have taken a similar approach in responding to the Penn State scandal by examining institutional policies related to this situation. Fifty-five of 69, or nearly 80 percent, of schools competing in Bowl Championship Series conferences, the highest level of college football, either reviewed or strengthened policies regarding minors on campus (Associated Press, 2013).

The observation that trustees were focused on the Penn State scandal is supported by the literature on higher education governance by confirming that boards are likely to be focused on compliance during a highly regulated period in higher education (Lake, 2013). From a stakeholder governance perspective, the focus on the lack of accountability assumed by the governance structure of Penn State in preventing the scandal testifies to a critique of stakeholder theory that organizations lacking accountability to directors or owners leads to ineffective organizations (Sternberg, 1997). In other words, if all stakeholder claims are viewed as legitimate, there may be a lack of accountability to the authority of any one group, thereby increasing organizational risk.

### **Summary**

The findings for research question one demonstrated that trustees are generally supportive of athletics at their institutions, most specifically due to the perceived influence of intercollegiate athletics on institutional pride and the student experience. Trustee connection to athletics as former student-athletes was determined to have an effect on how supportive a trustee was of athletics at their

institution. There was, however, considerable concern expressed about the fact that a disproportionate emphasis is often placed on athletics compared to other institutional priorities. Trustees expressed general confidence in the manner in which athletics is governed, with trust in administrative leadership identified as a major factor. Trustees voiced the greatest concern with athletic governance around scandals such as Penn State and the related effects on institutions.

The most unique element of the findings discussed in this chapter was the inherent conflicts in the sentiments expressed by trustees related to research question one. Despite the fact that trustees generally expressed support for athletics at their institutions, they also consistently voiced a concern about overemphasis of athletics both institutionally and nationally. Similarly, while trustees articulated a considerable level of confidence in athletic governance, particularly by discussing the trust they had in institutional leadership, they concurrently displayed a lack of understanding of the overall governance structure of athletics at their institutions. In addition, the trust in executive leadership was paired with a preoccupation on scandals in intercollegiate athletics and the related apprehension about risk to their own institutions.

Chapter Five, which presents the findings related to research questions two and three regarding the stake governing boards have in contributing to athletic governance and the associated challenges of intercollegiate athletics, will provide greater context into the manner in which these apparent conflicts manifest in a shared governance system. For example, trustees commented on the relative benefits of formal versus informal governance mechanisms, thereby exploring

questions related to the level of trust in administrators and the need for prescribed methods of board oversight designed to mitigate the risks associated with athletics. Most importantly, trustees identified several challenges to boards occupying effective roles in the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics, thereby leading to questions of whether stakeholder governance is an effective model for board involvement.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Stakeholder Roles and the Challenges of Intercollegiate Athletics**

This chapter presents the findings that addressed the second and third research questions. First, trustee perspectives about stakeholder governance of athletics and the roles that governing boards assume both on a formal and informal basis are presented. Second, challenges of operating a Division I athletic department, including finances and the distribution of power in college athletics, are reported.

#### **Trustees as Stakeholders in Athletic Governance**

Trustees were asked about the manner in which their boards acted as stakeholders in the governance of athletics. The line of questioning attempted to not only determine the structural tendencies of boards in providing oversight to athletics, but also to inquire about the relative importance of formal and informal governance actions related to athletics. Responses in this section varied from detailed descriptions on the role of athletic committees to thoughtful discussions on the difference between governance and management.

**Board roles in athletic governance.** Trustees identified several roles their boards assumed in the governance of intercollegiate athletics. In particular, trustees commented on formal oversight mechanisms, including athletics committees, athletics liaisons, and approval authorities.

***The athletics committee.*** The most common method of governing boards contributing to the shared governance of athletics cited by trustees was the presence of a board athletics committee. The purpose of an athletics committee

varied between trustees, but typically was described as the mechanism through which trustees would receive information reports on athletics. Student-athlete academic performance, athletic program budgets, and departmental compliance were the primary topics of information conveyed to athletic committees. The structure of athletic committees was typically described as functioning as any other board committee, with a segment of the board sitting on the committee on a rotational basis.

Trustees cited several reasons for implementing athletic committees. Trustees noted that typical board committee structures, with committees devoted to academic affairs, finance and budget, human resources, and facilities, tend to overlook athletic issues. Due to the high profile nature of intercollegiate athletics at their institutions, utilizing an athletic committee to address athletic matters was cited as a positive factor in fulfilling board governance responsibilities.

The perceived ineffectiveness of other standing committees of the board being able to adequately address the complexities of intercollegiate athletics was repeatedly communicated. Trustees did not elaborate on the factors associated with athletics that require a separate committee, but generally observed the inadequacy of relying on other mechanisms such as other committees and full board meetings. Trustee number five, a member of a public system board, discussed the factors for starting a special board committee on athletics by noting:

What happened at many institutions like ours is that we had our standing committees, but their agendas were so full, that athletic issues become subsumed by the broader issues these committees face. We have an

educational policy committee and a finance committee and the audit committee, but given all the things that are on their plate, it's hard to have real in-depth oversight of athletics.

In discussing the rationale for removing athletics from an existing committee on campus life issues to create a separate athletics committee, Trustee number 12 observed, "There's not a specific issue, only that athletics encompasses so much and it's so broad that we felt like we devoted complete attention to athletics and not share it with something else."

Trustees also noted that including an athletics committee in the formal board structure allowed for better oversight of institutional compliance functions for athletics, promotion of athletic-related issues and accomplishments, and more comprehensive supervision of athletic budgets. Trustee number 15, a private board member from a non-power conference institution that had a low profile athletic program, commented on the unique promotional reasons for elevating the athletics committee from being a sub-committee. The trustee noted:

One of my main focuses with the athletics committee was to make our board members aware of what our athletes were doing and the importance of athletics to the university and to student life....We give really energetic reports at meetings, because if we give energetic reports people will become engaged, come to games, and be more interested in athletics.

Trustee number 15's rationale of using the committee as an engagement, rather than an oversight, mechanism is not listed as a reason for the implementation of an athletics committee by AGB (2004).

Despite the general trust that trustees have in presidents regarding the governance of athletics, as chronicled in Chapter Four, one trustee observed that the presence of an athletic committee helped compensate when trust had broken down over athletic issues. As noted in Table 3.2, trustee number 13 focused his responses on his private board's relationship with the president. Regarding the athletics committee, he observed that the creation of the committee corresponded with the board expressing the desire to play a stronger role in athletic issues due to a lack of confidence in the president. Trustee number 13 commented:

The president we had at the time was not really an athletics guy. He would always tell us that he represents athletic issues to the board, but he never talked about it. We just felt that the board needed a better understanding of what was going on in athletics....We felt like we needed to be closer to it. So we started an ad hoc athletics committee several years ago. The board decided we liked it, so now it's a permanent committee of the board.

While the trustees that served on athletic committees were unanimous in their support the committees' function within board governance structures, board members also expressed concerns about the presence of an athletic committee that risked serving as a de facto athletic booster group. The perception that an athletics committee fueled athletic boosterism on a board enhanced trustee fears that the board would neglect its proper oversight responsibilities. Trustee number 21, who did not sit on her board's athletics committee, commented on the challenges of a booster-oriented athletics committee:



The athletics committee, truthfully, feels like a boys club to me...My impression is they can have blinders on and they approach things sometimes as that part of university life is the most important, and I think the rest of the board tries to balance that out....I would hope that the committee, as much as they love basketball and football and everything else, could be objective and tough if something arose that we need to deal with swiftly.”

Trustee number 22, who served on her board’s athletic committee and self-identified as an athletic booster, noted that the committee’s focus on fundraising led her to question the function of the committee. The trustee observed, “My misgivings about the athletics committee are that we are just a bunch of fundraisers and donors around the table....I would say that we are a fundraising arm, and I’m not sure we could be evolved into something else.”

Trustee comments on the benefits of having an athletic committee were in accordance with governing board literature that notes the importance of committees undertaking the unique work of higher education institutions (Ingram, 1980; Pelletier, 2012). Ingram (1980) pointed out, “A board’s need for information is too specialized to expect all trustees to be experts on all policy issues” (p. 69). Trustees speaking favorably of athletic committees were also in agreement with the recommendations of AGB (2004), which observed that athletic committees may be helpful in highlighting athletic issues not adequately addressed by other committees. AGB noted that having a committee was beneficial because athletic matters tend to “become ‘lost’ when handled by more

than one standing committee” (p. 12). AGB also observed that an athletics committee may help facilitate trust between the board and the president by writing, “If the relationship between the president, the athletics director and his or her staff, and the chair of the athletics committee goes well, the full board can be confident that the most important things are being attended to” (p. 12).

The recommendations of AGB (2004) regarding the consideration of an athletic committee also lend credence to trustee concerns about boosterism and institutional overemphasis on athletics. AGB observed, “The creation of an athletics committee can send the wrong signal regarding intercollegiate athletics; it inadvertently could reinforce perceptions that the governing board is disproportionately preoccupied with intercollegiate athletics” (p.12). The booster approach to an athletic committee has resulted in institutional scandals, including the case of Auburn University, which was placed on probation by its regional accrediting agency for micromanagement of athletics by athletic boosters who served on the board’s athletics committee and failure to provide ultimate authority to the president to oversee athletics (Fish, 2006; Gerber, 2005).

*AGB’s Survey of Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics* (2012) found that 46 percent of boards surveyed had a standing committee on athletics, while 52 percent did not. A similar proportion was generally reflected in this study, with approximately half of the governing boards included having a standing athletics committee at the time of the interviews. Specifically, eleven of the 23 governing boards had an athletic committee, nine did not have an athletics committee, one was in the process of creating a committee, one had an ad hoc

athletics work group, and one recently decided to eliminate the athletics committee after several years of one being in place.

Compared to the AGB (2012) study, which did not break down the athletic committee by type of institution, this study demonstrated that private boards may implement athletic committees more than public boards. Private boards included in this study were much more likely to have a standing athletics committee, with eight of the nine boards either having a committee or engaging in the process of creating one. Only four of fourteen public boards had or recently had in place a committee or work group devoted solely to athletics. This could be reflective of the fact that private governing boards typically delegate more work to committees, with private boards having on average eight standing committees and public governing boards only having five (AGB, 2010b; AGB, 2010c).

Examining the presence of committees from a stakeholder governance perspective, Post et al. (2002) argued that having dedicated board committees focus on a specific issue allows for board members to identify and address critical stakeholder issues and viewpoints. The implementation of an athletic committee could serve the purpose of providing a venue for all stakeholders, including trustees, institutional leadership, student-athletes, and other interested parties to adequately address the complex issues associated with intercollegiate athletics. However, when the purpose of a stakeholder approach to governance is the consideration of interests of all stakeholders (Freeman & Reed, 1983; Vinten, 2001), it is important to question whether the complete delegation of authority to board committees is serving that function. This study suggests that stakeholder

governance may not be implemented effectively if numerous trustees are ignorant of athletic issues because they are only being dealt with in the athletic committee.

***The athletics liaison.*** A unique role identified in this study was trustees acting as a formal liaison to the athletic department. The two trustees who self-identified as board-designated liaisons, described the role as an alternative to the implementation of a full athletic committee. The trustees described their liaison roles as allowing for a direct relationship between the governing board and the athletic department. Liaison responsibilities identified included meeting with the athletic director, attending other athletic-related meetings, and regularly reporting to the full board on athletic issues.

The two trustees that served as athletic liaisons both came from public boards, one from a system board and one from a single institution board. Trustee number three, who served on a public system board, was appointed as the liaison to the athletic department and the athletic fundraising association, thereby assuring governing board contact with such stakeholders as athletic boosters and donors. The trustee explained that the advantage of the role as having a board member who can develop a more in-depth understanding of athletics and communicate that to the board. Trustee number three observed, “The athletic director provides me, as the athletic liaison, a report of athletic accomplishments, which I provide to the board at each meeting.”

Trustee number 24 served as the liaison to the athletic department for his public single institution board. When asked to describe the role, he immediately responded with a comment on what the role did not include by stating:

I don't have any authority. The only authority the trustees have is when they act as a body. Furthermore, the athletic director reports to the president of the university and is part of the general management chain of the university. So I don't see the liaison role as being supervisory.

He went on to note that the implementation of the role stemmed from concern that the board was not adequately receiving information on athletic issues. The trustee explained:

It's really a communication path. And that's useful because athletics can have a big impact on the way people perceive the university, for the positive or the negative. Having a good flow of communications between management and athletics is a good thing.

The identification and discussion of trustee athletic liaisons contributes to the understanding of board governance of intercollegiate athletics because this role has not been included in higher education or board management literature. AGB's (2012) study of governing board practices related to athletics neglected to include discussion of athletic liaison roles. Due to the limited scope of this study, it is unknown whether the implementation of an athletic liaison position is widely used among governing boards. However, the potential positive effect of a liaison position is supported by literature on governing boards. Kezar (2006) observed that governing boards tend to isolate themselves to various institutional interests and that effective boards "listen to various stakeholders and engage the entire system of governance" (p. 998). Trustee number 24's description of the athletic liaison role is an example of engaging stakeholders in the governance of athletics

as he described such activities as regularly meeting with the athletic director, assisting on athletic presentations to the board, and attending meetings of the athletic department's fundraising organization.

Despite potential advantages, the implementation of an athletics liaison position could lead to questions regarding clarity of roles and responsibilities. AGB's *Statement on Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance* (2010) stated, "Clarity does not preclude overlapping areas of responsibility, but each group should understand whether its purview, as well as that of others in the governance process, is determinative, consultative, or informational" (p. 5). Although trustee number 24 observed that the athletic liaison role does not delve into management, the fact that he meets regularly with the athletic director and boosters makes it absolutely critical that the responsibilities of the position are clearly articulated in board governance documents. Trustee number 24 commented that the decision to have an athletic liaison was controversial on his board and that he "would only do it if we got clarity around what the role was."

From a governance perspective, the appointment of a board athletics liaison could be viewed as effective implementation of instrumental stakeholder theory in that an individual stakeholder is deployed as means for improving the communication and partnership between the board and the athletic department (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Letza et al., 2004). However, this approach could also be subject to critique when applied to a stakeholder governance framework in that the delegation of responsibility to an individual board member may inhibit transparent and effective governance (Mason et al., 2006). Mason et al. (2006)

argued that the instrumental involvement of board stakeholders may be problematic by observing:

The inclusion and management of stakeholders at board level must be transparent, clearly established and open to public scrutiny. If the governance process is complicated by the presence and poor management of stakeholders, the effectiveness and legitimacy of the entire process is open to doubt. (p. 289)

In other words, the reliance on individual stakeholders as athletic liaisons operating in what could be perceived as a nontransparent manner could compromise the overall effectiveness of athletic governance.

***Formal approval authority.*** Another manner in which boards have a formal role in the governance of athletics is through a board's authority vested in itself to approve certain athletic expenditures. Although there was some discussion among trustees regarding the approval of athletic facility projects, the most commonly referenced method for exerting such authority was through the approval of employment contracts for athletic department personnel. Trustees observed that contracts, either for new hires or extensions to existing personnel, were brought to the board dependent on a variety of conditions. These included whether the contract was for a specific position identified as requiring board approval or at or above a minimum dollar threshold. Responses on this subject generally focused on the contracts for coaches of the high profile sports of football and men's basketball.

Of the 23 governing boards included in this study, eleven approved contracts for athletic department personnel dependent on position or dollar threshold, while twelve did not. The distinction did not break down between public versus private boards as seven public boards approved contracts and seven did not. Among private boards, four approved contracts and five did not. These figures provide some new information on board oversight roles as compared to the AGB (2012) study, which did not specifically ask about board approval authority, but rather only discussed whether the chief executive approved coaching contracts in advance. The AGB study is unclear as to whether “in advance” means prior to board approval, board review, or some other categorization.

Trustees from boards who approved coaching contracts were generally positive about the implementation of board authority in this manner. Trustees observed that approving contracts, particularly for football and men’s basketball, provided the board with oversight authority in an area that can have significant financial ramifications due to the size of contracts. In discussing the various ways that his board dealt with athletic issues, Trustee number 11 observed that the magnitude of coaching contracts was a consistent issue. He commented, “Like any public university system, we’re constantly confronted with the pressure of multi-million dollar contracts for the major sports.”

Trustee number 19, who served on a public statewide coordinating board, cited another reason for approval authority over contracts by referencing the ability for board priorities and expectations to be included in contractual



agreements. In discussing an upcoming board vote on a contract extension for one of the system's athletic directors, the trustee explained that academic performance standards were included in contracts because of the involvement of the board. The trustee observed:

We developed a standard coaching contract that addresses the academic support, and that was one area that I pushed very hard was to increase the amount of bonuses for academic performance of the teams. And we also have the athletic director tied to that. So as his or her department improves their academic performance, it's a way to earn some incentive dollars.

Trustee number 18 made a similar point in noting that trustees should not only approve contracts, but also work with the administration on the front end to develop parameters for acceptable contract language. The trustee stated, "At the end of the day, is the entire package that they have negotiated acceptable? There may be some things you like or don't like, but at the end of the day is it something the full board can live with?"

The relationship between maintaining public confidence in the board and approval of contracts was emphasized by trustees. Understandably, this viewpoint was shared only by public institution trustees whose fiduciary responsibilities extend to maintaining the public trust in the institutions they govern. This approach is a manifestation of Argandona's (1998) notion of the common good being the foundation of stakeholder theory in which an organization's obligations are to all stakeholders, most notably the public as

fundings of public universities in this case. As noted in Table 3.2, Trustee number 11 was very focused on the public leadership of his statewide coordinating board.

The trustee observed:

It seems to me with these multi-million dollar contracts that the buck stops with the final authority, and that's the board. I would not have trouble delegating that to our presidents from the standpoint of them having the capability of doing it. But I think as a matter of public responsibility, the board needs to be able to tell the public that we're the ones that voted on a two million dollar contract. Our universities barely receive any financial aid from the legislature, yet we let the universities go and spend million bucks on a coach. We've had to answer for that....The presidents have to answer to this because they've recommended it to us. Yet we are public officials and the responsibility lies with us.

The trustees that were members of boards that did not approve coaching contracts were generally deferential to contractual matters being a component of the administrative role of presidents and athletic directors. Two trustees referenced corporate sector experience in which boards of directors are responsible for the hiring of a chief executive officer, but delegate the remainder of personnel decisions to management. Trustee number six explained this approach by stating, "I would liken it to my business experience. Other than the CEO, which is the board's responsibility to hire, evaluate, and terminate if necessary, the senior officers are the CEO's decision with consultation with the board. We use that same model." Trustee number 21 echoed this perspective,

responding when asked about the board approving coaching contracts, “No, we don’t do that. From a governance perspective, our board should be hiring and firing the CEO and shouldn’t be dealing with anybody else.”

Two trustees serving on public boards that delegate athletic personnel hiring and contract approval also expressed a wariness of navigating the highly visible territory of major coaching decisions. Given the highly engaged constituencies surrounding high profile teams, particularly in football and men’s basketball, these trustees observed that direct approval authority for coaching hires could lead to the governing board being blamed for poorly performing teams. Trustee number two, a public system board trustee, elaborated on this by stating, “I’ve had conversations with other trustees who have been in favor of reviewing the details of the coaching contracts. I’ve said that we don’t want to do that because then we hire the coaches and if it doesn’t work out, it’s our fault.”

Trustee number nine, a public statewide coordinating board member, commented that the public interest and scrutiny accompanying board involvement in athletic personnel matters led to clear lines being drawn between governance and management. While some trustees acknowledged that their boards had an expectation that presidents would at least keep them informed regarding coaching hires and contract negotiations, Trustee number nine desired no involvement in athletic personnel matters. He explained this perspective by stating:

We’re real careful on the contracts. We don’t want the presidents talking to us about the contracts. The board can’t be seen as hiring football or

basketball coaches. As soon as people think that, I'm going to have 500 people giving me opinions on football coaches.

The attention paid to athletic personnel matters, particularly the compensation of high profile coaches, and the subsequent approval authority reserved by some boards included in this study is not surprising given the research on this subject. Research has shown that coaching compensation was the greatest single factor in the exponential growth of athletic spending and that football and men's basketball coaches salaries were viewed as being excessive (Knight Commission, 2007; Knight Commission, 2009). Interestingly, the trustees who expressed positive opinions about their board's exercise of approval authority for athletic personnel matters did not frame their opinions around the constraint of coaching salaries. Despite the commonly held opinion that coaching contracts are excessive as compared to other institutional employees (Knight Commission, 2007; Knight Commission, 2009), trustees did not claim that their involvement in the process helped to transform the compensation market for coaches. Trustees instead focused their remarks on the importance of demonstrating public leadership in this area and emphasizing such priorities as academic incentives in personnel contracts.

Those trustees that expressed trepidation about their boards approving contracts reflected the governance recommendations on the subject of board approval of contracts. Specifically, there was considerable concern given to not encroaching on the authority granted to presidents and athletic directors to manage intercollegiate athletics. This reflects a concern expressed by AGB (2010)

that “boards should make a conscious effort to minimize the ambiguous or overlapping areas in which more than one governance participant or campus constituency has authority” (p. 4).

Stakeholder theory generally maintains that while stakeholder input is critical, not all stakeholders need to be a part of the formal decision-making structure (Phillips, 2003; Post et al., 2002). In the context of board approval authority over contracts, a traditional stakeholder approach would suggest that presidents should seek input from board members, but retain the responsibility of final decision-making. Post et al. (2002) summarized this input role of stakeholders by writing:

The reasonable attempts of various classes of stakeholders to exert a governance impact on the corporation have to be recognized as legitimate. The proposals involved, however – just like the proposals of conventional directors and shareowners – need not always be accepted, or given detailed study. (p. 246)

The literature on stakeholder theory also illustrated the challenges of delegated authority regarding decision-making (Blair, 1998; Charron, 2007; Sternberg, 1997). Blair (1998) highlighted one critique of stakeholder theory in that governance problems may arise when decisions are made by parties that do not assume ultimate responsibility and the associated risk associated with the use and control of institutional assets. In the case of approval authority over athletic matters, it could be argued that because the board retains overall fiduciary responsibility for institutions, boards should exert authority to approve contractual

matters that bear considerable financial and reputational risk. The importance of this exertion of institutional authority was clearly articulated by some trustees, particularly those from public boards that maintain a responsibility to protect public resources.

**Governance role versus micromanagement.** Regardless of whether a board had a structure that included an athletic committee or formally approved athletic personnel contracts, trustees spent a considerable amount of time discussing the concept of the board maintaining an appropriate stakeholder governance role versus delving too substantively into institutional management. The following findings discuss how trustees and boards strived to fulfill their governance role as related to intercollegiate athletics and the avoidance of micromanagement of athletic issues.

Trustees commented that maintaining an appropriate governance role around athletic issues was achieved by boards staying focused on institutional mission and policies, and the fulfillment of reporting requirements. Eight trustees specifically noted the distinctions between the day-to-day management of athletics being delegated to presidents and board-related work focusing on whether athletic policies sufficiently support the work of the administration. Some trustees observed that the official work of their boards regarding athletics predominantly dealt with administrative reporting in meetings. For example, two trustees commented that while the academic performance of student-athletes was an administrative responsibility, boards set clear expectations that information on this subject would be reported on a regular basis.

Individual trustees repeatedly stressed the importance of presidential management and defined board expectations while discussing how their boards maintained a governance-focused role. Essentially, boards delegated oversight of athletics to presidents, but communicated expectations through board governance documents that they should receive information on a defined set of athletic issues (e.g., policies denoting which contracts are to be approved by the board). When asked how his governing board's committees provide oversight to athletics, trustee number 26 observed:

In terms of how we govern athletics, the athletic director reports to the university president and day-to-day operations are led in that manner. The trustees are focused on the fundamental principles of governance, strategy, fundraising, and budgets, and inspecting commitments around the academic performance and overall performance of the athletic program.

When asked whether his views on college athletics had changed since becoming a board member, trustee number two echoed the previous quote about the importance of the board receiving appropriate information from the administration. The trustee commented:

Our role as the board is to make the policy and see that the policy is being followed, but not to micromanage things....It's very necessary to have institutional control and have meaningful reports about athletic activities so there are no surprises in the newspaper. It's very important to know that the policies that have promulgated are being followed.

The focus on presidential authority and maintaining an appropriate distance from micromanagement was clearly articulated by two trustees from public institutions, likely due to the fact that inappropriate involvement in athletics would yield a high level of visibility. Trustee number nineteen, who served on a statewide coordinating board, noted that the relationship between the board and the president may be challenged if presidents believe that the board moves from governance to management. The trustee commented, "It's a very critical relationship and it's something we need to look at even more because there's a concern from some presidents that we are too involved in their day-to-day management." Another statewide coordinating board member, Trustee number nine, observed that guaranteeing presidential control of athletics was an important achievement during his time in a board leadership role by explaining:

A few years back, they created athletic corporations at our major institutions. These are separate organizations, and the athletic director would become chairman of the corporation. What it led to is athletics believing that they were their own organization. Those athletic boards would make decisions, and then they would inform us of what those decisions would be. In an open meeting I reminded them that the athletics corporation was nothing more than advisory groups to our presidents, and that we had the authority to abolish the athletic corporations at any moment and return full authority to the state. Because there's one person in charge of athletics at our institutions, and that's the president. That was, in my role as chairman, probably the most important thing that I



helped accomplish in terms of athletics, was communicating to the athletics folks that nobody was going to put up with their bullshit about who was in charge of what.

While trustees were cognizant of the problem of micromanagement of intercollegiate athletics, there was minimal concern that it was an issue for their governing boards. Some trustees observed that the line between management and governance was considered with every issue that came before the board, regardless of whether it was related to athletics. This corresponds with the literature on governing boards that identifies avoidance of micromanagement as a foundational element of effective higher education boards (AGB, 2007; de Russy, 1996; Kearns, 1998; Sample, 2003). Three trustees commented that the occurrence of board members inappropriately crossing the line into athletic management only happened in the past but was no longer a problem. Trustee number eight, who had served as a public system board member for over twenty years, remarked:

There were reports back in the 1960s and 70s of members of the board actively recruiting coaches and being involved in those kind of processes. But that hasn't happened since I've been on the board. I don't know if you could get a good athletics director today that would put up with that kind of activity.

Some trustees noted that not having an athletic program with considerable interest from fans and the public might play a role in trustees avoiding micromanagement. At institutions where athletics is a major component of the

public's institutional awareness, trustees commented on the intense public scrutiny of how their boards interact with athletics, quite often asking for trustees to take on a more active role in management decisions. However, two trustees from institutions where athletics was much less visible conveyed the sense that maintaining an appropriate governance role was easier because of the lack of public interest. Trustee number 25 responded to a question on whether the presence of an athletics committee increased the occurrences of stepping over the line into micromanagement by observing:

We've pretty easily been able to stay on the governance side. Part of that may be because we're not a very high-profile program. There are a core group of folks that are passionate about our athletic program, but we're not a Michigan or an Ohio State where the state lives and dies with every touchdown.

Trustee number 26 answered a similar question on the work of his board's athletics committee by remarking, "I would tell you that we have been fortunate because we have a fairly new athletic program....So we don't have a culture of crossing the line and not understanding role clarity."

The preceding quotations regarding the relative level of interest in an athletic program and the corresponding effect on board governance demonstrates that stakeholders may assume different roles dependent on the organization.

Donaldson and Preston (1995) argued that stakeholders are identified by their interest in an organization and the resultant functional interest that an organization has in them. Clearly, the interest level of fans, alumni, and booster groups is

exceedingly higher at institutions with high profile athletic departments, primarily found among power conference institutions. In turn, the functional interest of institutions in those stakeholders will yield actions to address the high level of interest. Therefore, it is not surprising that trustees identified the variance of stakeholder influence in their comments.

The literature on governance versus management tends to focus on governing boards overstepping their authority into management areas and failing to observe the line between policy and administration (AGB, 2010; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007; Kerr & Gade, 1989). Governing boards, due to being composed of people with substantial management experience, often yield to the enticement of micromanagement rather than focusing on governance (AGB, 2007; Longanecker, 2006). AGB (2004) noted that athletics in particular may compel boards to overstep their role by writing, “That intercollegiate athletics can attract, generate, or lose large sums of money and often is the institution’s most visible component compels institutional leaders to pay close attention. Consequently, boards should exercise appropriate oversight while avoiding micromanagement, viewing athletics with a dispassionate perspective” (p. 3).

Despite the tendency of the literature to focus on governing board micromanagement (AGB, 2010; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Longanecker, 2006), trustees did not believe that their boards exceeded their governance role around athletics. Trustees repeatedly referenced the concept of ensuring presidential authority. The results of this study correspond with the governance recommendations of the NCAA (2006) and AGB (2007), which were

unequivocal in stating that the administrative management and oversight of intercollegiate athletics rests in the hands of institutional presidents. However, there is not consensus among higher education organizations that governing boards should delegate all authority to presidents, who are the institutional delegates to conferences and the NCAA, for the management of athletics. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (2014) urged trustees to take an active role in athletics, writing, “It is critical for trustees actively to oversee their intercollegiate athletics programs, rather than allow outside organizations such as the NCAA and athletic conferences to dictate governance prerogatives. Trustees cannot expect participants in this multibillion-dollar industry to police themselves” (p. 6).

**Informal consultation versus formal action.** Trustees routinely identified informal consultation with university leadership about important athletic issues as a key component of the stakeholder role of governing boards. This consultative role was described by trustees as being outside of the domain of formal board meeting structures or approval authority, but instead focused on a culture of communication between administrators, predominantly presidents, and trustees. Informal consultation occurred in a routine way before board meetings when an athletic-related vote was scheduled or in more unique situations where the administration wanted to ensure trustees understood an important athletic issue.

Reflecting on the importance of this informal approach to governance, several trustees emphasized the magnitude of knowing that the president will

reach out to trustees regarding athletic issues when appropriate. As noted in Table 3.2, trustee number 18 devoted considerable time in his interview to the importance of communication with the board on athletic issues. When asked about the relationship between the board and the president regarding athletic matters, Trustee number 18 commented:

As issues come up, our president does pick up the phone and communicate. If we have questions, he's more than willing to answer our questions and discuss the issue and compare notes, compare thoughts. I believe it's his decision at the end of the day, but I think he does take into account our perspectives.

Trustee number eight, whose board oversees a public system with one institution in a power conference, observed that informal consultation is critical because it allows for alignment of views when items come before the full board in a public setting. The trustee explained:

There will be communication between the president, athletics director, and key trustees to make sure we're all together, singing out of the same songbook before something goes to the full board, in order to avoid having unexpected questions come up.

Though he had a lengthy record of service on his public system board, trustee number eight did not acknowledge that informal consultation with the intent of removing obstacles before formal decision-making may be construed as negating the intent of open meeting and records laws, commonly-known as sunshine laws (McLendon & Hearn, 2006). Cleveland's (1985) analysis of

sunshine laws as applied to higher education noted that consultation prior to decision-making has not typically been prohibited by such legislation, but that governing boards and administrators must continually be conscious of the public perception of how decisions are made. Trustee number 26, who served on a public board, observed about presidential consultation:

Our president is fairly comfortable picking up the phone and trustees picking up the phone to her to say let's catch up and talk about a few things. We obviously play by the rules of state sunshine laws, but we have no problem talking about critical success measures around athletics.

Informal consultation mostly occurred during coaching searches and contracts negotiations of high profile programs. Not surprisingly, trustees perceived it was extremely helpful to have their institutional presidents keep them informed on a regular basis during a major coaching search that attracted public and media interest. In discussing the board's role in coaching searches or contract negotiations, trustee number four remarked that presidents recognize the unique nature of high profile sports by stating:

With football and men's basketball, and I'm not certain if this is part of our governance structure or just because presidents are pragmatic and not stupid, they would run those by us because of the expenditures. When we gave our basketball coach a raise in the last basketball season, I know I had a call from the president saying this is what he's demanding, this is what we're going to offer, that kind of thing. But I've never gotten a call about women's cross country or men's tennis.

One board member expressed frustration about situations where a lack of consultation occurred prior to important decisions, thereby indicating a breakdown in the stakeholder governance of athletics. Trustee number 22, who served on her institution's athletics committee, was disturbed about a coaching contract extension that was shared adequately with neither the athletics committee nor the full board. The trustee commented:

In terms of contracts and management, those are pretty much decided by the athletic department, the CFO, and the president. We are not really informed as to what that is about. As a board member, I feel it's a little problematic....For me to pick up the paper and read that they just signed our men's basketball coach to a new contract and they speculate what his salary is going to be. I think that communication line could be better than it is currently.

Trustee number 22's reference to a lack of consultation on a contractual issue betrays what Hasnas (2013) believes to be a central purpose of stakeholder theory, which is to bring the interests of all organizational stakeholders into balance. The lack of informal consultation with the trustee may simply mean that stakeholder governance failed regarding this specific situation or it could suggest that the organizational expectations around consultation are deficient.

It was clear that several trustees placed enormous value on the informal consultation with institutional leaders, presidents in particular, on athletic issues. However, an important question is whether consultation on athletic issues is more important than the board exerting its authority in this area through meeting time

devoted to athletics or formal actions on athletic issues. In other words, is it more critical for the board's stake in the governance of intercollegiate athletics to be as an active, public participant in decision-making or as a knowledgeable advisor to the administrators who manage athletics, most pertinently institutional presidents?

One reason that trustees cited formal board involvement being more important than informal consultation was that formal mechanisms gave the board greater opportunity to provide oversight on issues related to risk management and compliance in the athletic department. Given the potential for misconduct in athletics and the associated institutional problems that may follow, trustees emphasized the importance of having a deliberate, formal process for boards to be involved in athletic issues. Trustee number seven, who was finishing a twelve-year term on his private institution board, the last six of which he had served as either vice chair or chair, devoted considerable time in his interview to the fiduciary responsibilities formally executive by the board and the audit and compensation committees. The trustee explained:

The reputational risk associated with athletics is pretty high right now and it's a big issue for every board. I think the board needs to have some kind of formal process to review the athletic department and at least have some kind of process to give input, whatever they want on a regular basis. I think if you leave it to the casual occurrence, you're not fulfilling your fiduciary responsibility.

Trustees that valued informal consultation with institutional leadership over formal oversight mechanisms voiced a common theme that formal board



meetings are not productive or often enough to lessen the importance of communication outside of board meetings. Board meetings were either too infrequent or lacking in substance, thereby contributing to the belief that spending time outside of formal board responsibilities on athletic issues was imperative to effective oversight. Trustee number 18, a public single institution board member, commented:

Meeting only six times a year, if you're not having more frequent dialogue and interactions with the university, in this case with the president and his leadership team as it relates to athletics, then you're probably not doing a good job providing proper oversight.

Trustees observed that formal opportunities to discuss athletic issues in board meetings often lacked substance. Instead of providing opportunities for trustees to markedly contribute to institutional decision-making on athletic-related issues, formal interactions with athletics were characterized as merely opportunities for superficial reporting from administrators. As noted in Table 3.2, Trustee number 14 repeatedly argued for greater board involvement in athletics by trustees. The trustee downplayed the formal work of his board's formal athletics committee, stating, "I think our athletics committee is a dog-and-pony show. It doesn't have much substance to it....I believe that the informal dialogue supersedes anything that takes place from a formal standpoint."

The lack of substance in formal board reports on athletics was more prevalent in comments from trustees of public boards. Public trustees noted that sunshine laws impeded substantive discussion on the challenges posed by athletic

matters. Issues such as the financial requirements to support Division I athletics or escalating coaching salaries were observed by trustees as topics extremely difficult to broach in a public setting. As noted previously in this chapter, a prevalence of utilizing informal consultation due to the challenges of sunshine laws may lead to public scrutiny of board governance.

Trustee responses regarding formal versus informal governance suggests that the experience of being a trustee of a private board is a much different experience than service on a public board, whether single institution, system, or statewide coordinating. For example, not only were private boards much more likely to implement the formal structure of an athletics committee to provide oversight to intercollegiate athletics, private board trustees tended to place greater importance on formal governance mechanisms than informal consultation. One inference from these results is that public conversations on intercollegiate athletics are challenging due to the massive public interest in college sports.

Trustees commented on this distinction between private and public boards in dealing with intercollegiate athletic issues, noting that operating in an environment of sunshine laws and public scrutiny makes formal conversations around intercollegiate athletic governance challenging. Trustee number 24, who served on a public single institution board, commented, “I think the formal reports are for the public record. A lot of what you see in public universities, meetings of the trustees are pretty formalized because of the open meetings act. A lot of the high value content occurs informally.” In commenting on the benefits of dealing with athletics on a private board, trustee number seven observed:

There's a lot of things that are hard to work through if they're played out on a public microphone and then you get people commenting on it that aren't necessarily focused on the excellence of the institution. I guess that's the price for getting public funding.

The findings are consistent with the higher education literature emphasizing consultation as one of the foundations of shared governance (Birnbaum, 2004; Kaplan, 2004). Kezar (2004) observed the importance of informal leadership and consultation over formal governance structures by writing:

A governance system can operate with imperfect structures and processes, but if leadership is missing and relationships and trust damaged, the governance system will likely fail for lack of direction, motivation, meaning, integrity, a sense of common purpose, ways to integrate multiple perspectives, open communication, people willing to listen, and legitimacy. (p. 44)

The study also indicates that the majority of trustees are in agreement with Birnbaum's (2004) conclusion that "soft" governance, or the connections and interactions that happen outside of the formal system, produce greater results than "hard" governance, or organizational structures, policies, and procedures that define authority.

The study documents an application of instrumental stakeholder theory (Jones, 1995; Letza et al., 2004). This form of stakeholder governance views stakeholder interests as "means" to improving organizational effectiveness rather

than “ends” to formal governance decisions (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Letza et al., 2004;). Similarly, regardless of whether a governing board is formally involved in athletic-related decisions, a culture in which informal consultation is expected on important athletic issues leads to trustees acting as instruments in the stakeholder governance of athletics.

A significant component of an athletic governance structure based on informal consultation, at least when related to governing boards, is the corresponding reliance on trusting the administration to communicate with trustees on athletic matters. As noted in Chapter Four, several trustees conveyed a sense of trust in institutional presidents to effectively manage intercollegiate athletics. However, it was also observed by multiple trustees that their board’s formal involvement in athletics stemmed from a lack of trust in their presidents. A critique of stakeholder theory offered by Greenwood and Van Buren (2010) is that dependent stakeholders, in this case trustees, can only rely on the trustworthiness of the organization to keep them engaged and to limit egregious behavior. Minus formal mechanisms for providing oversight to athletics, trustees are completely bound to the willingness of institutional presidents to keep them informed on athletic issues, thereby potential compromising effective stakeholder governance.

The study charts new ground in the literature on higher education governance and stakeholder management regarding the difference between public and private boards in their ability to employ formal mechanisms of governance. While AGB (2010b) provided distinctions between public and private boards in

terms of composition and general practices, this study offered new perspectives on the manner in which public and private boards are realistically able to provide oversight to the high profile area of intercollegiate athletics. The results demonstrated that public boards face greater challenges in substantively discussing athletic-related matters in a formal meeting setting than do private boards, thereby leading to the conclusion that public board trustees valued informal consultation greater than formal board interactions.

### **Board Challenges in the Governance of Athletics**

Trustees identified various challenges their boards faced in contributing as stakeholders in the governance of intercollegiate athletics. Challenges related to athletics at their own institutions, but also noted broad national trends that complicated their ability to fulfill a stakeholder role in athletic governance. Responses in this section were categorized into the two broad themes of financial implications of supporting a Division I athletic department and the perceived lack of influence held by boards in decision-making on athletic issues.

**Athletic expenditures.** The challenge in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics most often cited by trustees was related to the massive financial commitment needed to support a Division I athletic enterprise. Trustee comments focused on concerns around the inequitable position of smaller athletic programs trying to maintain a pace of spending with more powerful institutions. There was also conversation of more wealthy athletic departments being criticized for generating too much profit and not giving back to other components of the institutional mission.

Of the 15 trustees that serve on boards overseeing no power conference institutions, ten made comments regarding the financial challenges in maintaining a competitive athletic department. These trustees conveyed the belief that the economics of intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level does not result in a level playing field. Whereas institutions from the power conferences are often the beneficiaries of multi-million conference media disbursements and massive ticket and premium seating revenue, the majority of trustees governing non-power conference institutions noted that their governing boards spend considerable time devoted to athletics on determining how the athletic enterprise will be funded. The expectation of smaller institutions having to compete on the field, in the classroom, and in recruiting with institutions maintaining a considerable financial advantage was labeled as a primary institutional challenge as related to athletics.

The issue of institutional subsidies to support intercollegiate athletics was repeatedly brought up by trustees as a focal point of board involvement in athletic matters. The trustees from less prominent athletics programs, mostly from non-power conferences but not exclusively, believed the amount of institutional funding devoted to athletics was a constant source of discussion and quite often, tension, among board members. Trustee number ten expressed a commonly-held viewpoint that increasing institutional funding devoted to athletics was leading his institution down an unsustainable path by stating, “My views on athletics have changed significantly since being on the board and realizing the monetary cost of athletics to the university....I believe that only the very biggest of the universities can afford to be Division I, especially in football.” Interestingly, trustee number

ten observed that altering his institution's approach to athletics through a de-emphasis on football was unlikely due to the board and the president not wanting to be responsible for what would likely be an unpopular decision with boosters and alumni.

When asked about issues that have caused his board consternation, trustee number thirteen, who served on a private board from a non-power conference, commented that the level of institutional subsidy was a constant topic for the board. The trustee observed:

The consternation for the board is all around money. Athletics at most institutions, especially small institutions like ours, is not 100 percent self-funded. So the institution pays a portion of the money that goes to support athletics. And that's always been a bone of contention among board members and particularly the previous president, about what percentage of athletics total expenditures should the university kick in.

Trustee number 13 additionally noted that the conversation about the financial support needed to sustain a successful Division I athletic department was driven by the board rather than the administration and that the board eventually reached consensus on the appropriate level of institutional subsidy.

The absence of a self-supporting athletic program, or one that does not receive any institutional subsidy, was not isolated to the lesser profile athletic institutions. Despite the influx of revenue flowing from television contracts and ticket revenue, trustees that govern power conference institutions also noted that institutional support was required to maintain a high performing athletic

department. Trustee number five, who served on a board of a public system with one institution in a power conference, commented:

The policy of the system is that schools are supposed to be self-sustaining. And that's not necessarily been the case. Our main campus has had to borrow for facilities and some of the other institutions have had to borrow from their reserves for operating deficits. The self-sustaining concept has been a goal but has not been achieved.

Trustee number 17, whose private institution is from a power conference and recently achieved a great deal of athletic success after substantial institutional investment in facilities and coaching contracts, observed that accomplishment had come at a high price. The trustee commented, "We've benefitted by keeping up....Our applications are through the roof. Our SAT scores are up. Our donations are up. Everything's good. But we've had to plug a bunch of money into the program."

One trustee observed that problems may arise within institutions that have self-supporting athletic programs. Trustee number 29, who served on a public single institution trustee from a power conference, observed that her institution's wealthy athletic department annually has had surplus revenue, thereby leading to tension with academic departments, particularly those with funding challenges., After being posed the question of whether too much money in athletics has a downside at her institution, the trustee recounted a situation in which non-athletic events in athletic facilities produced additional revenue for the athletic



department, which caused consternation among board members. Trustee number 29 commented:

There's a lot of internal angst and very robust conversations that the money should flow to the general fund....And of course the athletic director is very possessive of any kind of income that comes through the building should go to athletics. And there are other parts of the university that really resent it. It's bad for morale, and all those other issues that come with it. When you're successful, people start arguing over the money.

Some trustees also believed that understanding the financial issues in intercollegiate athletics was challenging. Athletic budgets were not only complex but trustees were often provided insufficient information to substantively contribute to discussions around athletic finances. Trustee number 22, interestingly turned a question about whether trustees veer inappropriately into management issues by expressing frustration about the lack of information that the administration provided to trustees on athletic department finances. The trustee noted:

On the finance part of it, I think by handling it at the administrative level, a lot of the contentious issues are not debated. They're not really discussed.... I feel like as a member of the athletic committee, I should have that data. I should know the athletic department gets X million dollars. Even if it's just in pots. I just feel like I'm totally ignorant in this area and I shouldn't be.

Trustee number 28, who served on a public statewide coordinating board with no power conference institutions, explained that his board's response to the complexities of athletic finances was the implementation of a policy requiring that athletic department budgets are brought to the board for approval. The trustee observed:

Our thinking is both of our athletic departments have been operating with significant deficits. We're not interested in having academic subsidize athletics. So what we're looking at isn't how much money is given to football or basketball or bowling, we're looking at whether or not they're operating in the black.

Trustee observations of the challenges associated with athletic finances were consistent with the literature, particularly studies focused on the overall financial health of Division I athletic departments (Denhart & Vedder, 2010; Fulks, 2013). Given that a minimal percentage of NCAA Division I athletic departments have not received institutional subsidies (Fulks, 2013), it is not surprising that trustees consistently cited the financial obligations of supporting a Division I athletic program as one of the most considerable challenges faced by boards. The study is also consistent with the Knight Commission's (2009) survey of NCAA Division I-FBS college presidents, which found that less than a quarter believe that intercollegiate athletics was sustainable in its current form and that over 85 percent feel that compensation for football and men's basketball coaches is excessive. The financial challenges associated with sponsoring Division I athletics are likely to be exacerbated with the recent NCAA governance reform

that gives greater financial autonomy to the power conferences, thereby widening the gap between those institutions with abundant resources and those without, both inside and outside of the power conferences (Wolken, 2014). Trustee number ten was interviewed prior to the NCAA governance reform taking place, but he correctly predicted the autonomy decision and noted further challenges for his non-power conference institution by observing, “We can’t fight the fight. If the big boys decide to take off, then they will. If they decide to pay \$2,000 per student-athlete for side money, we can’t do that.”

Trustee acknowledgment of the complexity of athletic financing was not surprising given the board governance literature devoted to intercollegiate athletics. AGB (2010) observed that the multifaceted manner in which athletic departments are financed makes it hard for boards to fulfill their ultimate responsibility of maintaining institutional fiscal integrity. Regarding the manner in which boards should approach the topic of athletic finances, AGB (2012) observed:

The board needs to know the extent to which the funding for athletics comes from the institution’s general fund, student fees, or support from affiliated foundations or state government, and how such funding comports with board policy. The board should understand the extent to which funds that might otherwise go to academic programs are directed instead to athletics. (p. 19)

**Governance without power.** Trustees also discussed various scenarios in which they felt the board lacked power in providing oversight to their institutional

athletic departments, thereby weakening the effectiveness of this stakeholder group in the shared governance of athletics. The perceived absence of authority was attributed to such factors as the external influence of media, the power wielded by high profile coaches, and external control over the recent trend of conference realignment decisions. Generally, trustees conveyed a sense of disillusionment that despite board interest in enhancing athletic oversight, a host of factors prevented legitimate involvement in athletic-related matters.

Trustees commented on the power wielded by media, particularly television networks, in controlling the national dialogue regarding college athletics and operational matters in athletics. For example, institutions have had minimal influence over game times for the prominent sports of football and men's basketball, which are completely decided by television networks in accordance with lucrative broadcast contracts (Drum, 2013). Trustee number two elaborated on the manner in which this has evolved over time by stating:

At the national level, a lot more money is spent on athletics, and put into the game. Television has had a great influence. When I was growing up, you could always count on the Saturday afternoon football game. Now it's whenever ESPN wants to put it on.

When asked of his viewpoints on the national landscape of college athletics, Trustee number 25 reiterated the power of television networks by noting:

It's being primarily driven by the need for television to have content.

When you have 150 channels all on 24 hours a day, and 15 of them are

sports channels, they need content. It's really been driven over the last twenty years by television, led by ESPN.

Media organizations are stakeholders in the governance of intercollegiate athletics and have an expressed role in how athletic programs are publicized and funded. As pointed out in this study, a prioritization among claims may occur in a stakeholder governance system (Ryan, 1990) and it is not surprising that trustees view the media as being prioritized given the high notoriety of intercollegiate athletics. However, a prioritization of claims should not necessarily entail an exclusion of influence in decision-making. Neither of the two previously quoted trustees mentioned the fact that decisions around game times and the overall power of the television networks are codified by the conference media rights packages, which are approved by the conference boards made up of institutional presidents (Drum, 2013). It is unclear if this means that trustees are being completely excluded from conference media negotiations, presidents are not consulting with boards, or a shared sentiment of presidents and trustees that individual institutions are at the will of conference commissioners.

Trustees also noted the challenge of coaches in the major sports of football and men's basketball being the most highly compensated and powerful institutional employees. This perspective is not surprising given that across the United States, the highest paid public employee in 27 states is a football coach and in 13 states a men's basketball coach (Fischer-Baum, 2013). Trustees were frustrated when presidents and boards simply were incapable of speaking out against or disciplining coaches that were popular due to considerable success in

athletic performance. The perceived immunity of high profile coaches complicated the chain of authority embedded in traditional university governance structures. Despite the fact that coaches report to athletic directors and presidents to governing boards, trustees observed that board support for a president or athletic director may be meaningless in disputes with powerful, popular coaches.

Comments on the inability to challenge powerful coaches was not isolated to trustees from power conference institutions, but those that addressed this issue all referenced very successful coaches who were received extremely high compensation. Trustee number 21, who served on a private board from a non-power conference, observed that her institutional president made a clear case that “we needed to reward our basketball coach and keep him happy because there was a belief that the success of the program was due to him.” Trustee number nine, who chaired a statewide coordinating board with multiple power conference institutions, illustrated the challenges of dealing with coaches by recounting a conversation with his institutional presidents about how the board would provide unconditional support regarding athletics.

One of the presidents says, if my basketball coach walks into my office tomorrow, and demands something that I can’t or won’t do, or I think is bad for the university, and he walks out and quits, I have to resign by 5 o’clock, period. But the board said no, we would support you because you would be right. The president then said if I did that and caused the coach to leave, I would have no ability to govern the university.

An interesting case study on the power dynamics in college athletics involved the massive amount of conference realignment that occurred in recent years. From 2010 to 2013, nine power conference institutions switched conferences, a new Division I-FBS conference was created, and many other institutions switched conferences at all levels of Division I (Forde, 2013). Fourteen trustees governed institutions that either switched conferences during their time on the board or had the existence of their current conference threatened by other institutions moving. These trustees recounted a variety of scenarios of how their boards were involved in the decision-making process, from passively observing developments to actively lobbying other institutions for their institution's conference seat. The vast majority of trustees discussing this issue, however, observed that their boards maintained a very limited role in conference affiliation decisions due their influence being restricted.

Only one trustee described a very active board role in decisions around institutional athletic conference affiliation. Trustee number 17, whose institution was in a conference that was being threatened with elimination due to other members leaving, recounted a lengthy ordeal in which the board took a leadership role in preserving the existing conference. When asked about the board's specific involvement, the trustee responded, "We led it. To the point where I had to jump on a plane and show up at board meetings of other member institutions. As chairman, I was on the phone for six straight weeks, twenty hours a day." The activist role regarding conference affiliation decisions described by trustee number 17 was very much in line with his other answers that described a private

board that was very active in many aspects of athletic governance, including leading fundraising efforts for new athletic facilities.

Most trustees described their role in conference realignment decisions as being advisory to presidents. Given that presidents typically serve as board members for their respective athletic conference councils, trustees either explicitly or implicitly delegated authority to presidents to enter into conference affiliation decisions. Trustee number nine, whose statewide coordinating board oversaw multiple institutions involved in realignment discussions, observed that his board provided explicit authority and instructions to the institutional presidents. He stated, “Our primary job was to be a buffer between the CEO’s and the rest of the world, but also to provide the CEO’s with the comfort that they were the people who were going to make the final decisions. But we wanted to be consulted if anything changed.” As noted in Table 3.2, this comment by trustee number nine was very much in line with limited involvement in athletic matters by his board.

Despite having final approval authority over the ultimate conference affiliation decisions, trustees noted that they felt as though they were essentially rubber-stamping a decision that had already been finalized. Three trustees cited the conference requirement of confidentiality agreements for those involved in the negotiations as hindering the opportunity for boards to actively partake in decision-making process. So while presidents sometimes informed board leadership and select trustees about the status of affiliation negotiations, the sentiment of some trustees was their boards as a whole were ill informed and substantively excluded from the process.



Trustee number 22, who served on a board overseeing a private institution that was embroiled in a lengthy conference realignment discussion, characterized the board's role as very minimal in stating, "In terms of decision-making, we did not decide what the conference was going to be. We were brought up to speed and ultimately there was a vote and we did decide, but all the nuances and strategy were developed by the administration." Trustee number five, whose public system board oversaw an institution that moved between power conferences, directed his frustration at the conferences, rather than institutional presidents, commenting:

To the extent that these conferences are imposing very onerous confidentiality requirements on universities, I think in many respects it conflicts with good governance....I think that this strikes at the heart of how can a university be governed if a board does not have basic information.

The trustee expressed additional frustration with the manner in which the board was forced to make the final decision by stating:

For the most part, the trustees were not brought into it. Not until the last minute on one night, and then we were supposed to vote the next day. I just think it's not the way to run a railroad or a university....I think the bigger issue from a national perspective, is should the tail be wagging the dog? Should these conferences be dictating the information flow to boards?

Trustee perspectives on a perceived lack of power in contributing to the governance of athletics is consistent with the sport management literature (Miller, Eder, & Sandomir, 2013; Smith & Ourand, 2012; Staples, 2013). Television networks such as ESPN are largely thought to be the most powerful influence in the major sports of football and men's basketball (Miller et al., 2013). Media listings of the most powerful people in college sports focus heavily on conference commissioners and television network executives, rarely mentioning university staff (Smith & Ourand, 2012; Staples, 2013). Regarding conference affiliation, although Sweitzer (2009) observed that switching conferences is often carried out for reasons outside of athletics, including overall institutional prestige, the vast majority of recent conference changes have occurred because there is a financial advantage to both the institution making the switch and the conference adding a new member (Staples, 2012).

This study documents a set of athletic issues (i.e., the setting of game times) that trustees, acting as stakeholders, believed they were not able to sufficiently contribute to decision-making. From a stakeholder perspective, the concept of functioning in a governance role without a corresponding level of power is at odds with the tenets of stakeholder theory (Letza et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2007; Post et al., 2002). Despite the acknowledgment that there may a prioritization of stakeholder claims (Crane & Ruebottom, 2012; Ryan, 1990), a fundamental component of stakeholder governance is that decision-making is framed around the influence and opinions of all stakeholders (Post et al., 2002).

The findings presented in this chapter call to question whether stakeholder governance is an appropriate model for governing boards to participate in intercollegiate athletic oversight. An alternative question may not be whether stakeholder governance is an appropriate functional model, but rather how governing boards might assume a more influential role. Crane and Ruebottom (2012) concluded their review of stakeholder theory by observing:

From an instrumental perspective, where firm responses might be based on rational interest-based calculations of the power, legitimacy, and urgency of the claims of different identity groups, then the question arises as to which identities are most likely to be recognized as powerful and legitimate by firms, and how societal constituencies might be able to build such stakeholder capital. (p. 85)

This study has summarized findings related to a variety of governance mechanisms, both informal and formal, in which boards attempt to build such stakeholder capital and establish an appropriate and influential stakeholder role in the governance of intercollegiate athletics. Chapter six will devote considerable attention to the governance structures and roles described in this study to better ascertain the effectiveness of boards participating in the shared governance of athletics.

One interesting finding related to board challenges was the fact that very few trustees mentioned gender equity and Title IX compliance as an area of consternation for their boards. Five trustees mentioned Title IX as a topic that their boards or athletic committees devoted attention to, but only two trustees

cited it as a specific challenge for their boards. This lack of attention is noted due to the preponderance of organizations, including AGB (2004), the NCAA (2006), and the Knight Commission (2001), that cited gender equity in athletics and Title IX compliance as an athletic governance area that requires comprehensive institutional and board engagement.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings and discussion on the second two research questions. The first theme identified under research question two dealt with the various roles that boards assume in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics. Trustees commented on the advantages and risks associated with the implementation of athletics committees, the appointment of trustees as athletics liaisons, and the board exercising formal approval over athletic related matters. A second theme identified by trustees was the importance of maintaining an appropriate governance role and avoiding micromanagement of athletics. A final theme identified for research question two was the debate about whether informal consultation on athletics is more important than formal board structures and processes.

Two themes were identified for the third research question. The first challenge associated with athletic governance was related to the complex financial obligations of supporting Division I athletics. A second theme emerging under the third research question was the sentiment that governing boards are limited in power in dealing with athletic issues by external entities such as television networks and athletic conferences.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

This purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of trustees of NCAA Division I institutions on intercollegiate athletics and the manner in which higher education governing boards act as stakeholders in the shared governance of athletics. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 29 trustees from 23 different governing boards that oversaw at least one institution at the NCAA Division I level. This chapter will provide a summary of the findings, develop or draw out theoretical and empirical implications, suggest recommendations for policy and practice, discuss study limitations, and offer recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of Findings**

Trustees displayed a balanced view in conveying their general perspectives on intercollegiate athletics, with near unanimity in believing that athletics was a positive component of their colleges and universities. A variety of factors, predominantly from an anecdotal basis, were cited as contributing to these positive viewpoints, including an enhanced student experience, engaged alumni, and national branding for their institutions. At the same time, trustees routinely commented that intercollegiate athletics tended to play an oversized role on their campuses in comparison to the primary academic mission. This contradiction between support for athletics and concerns about overemphasis reflects the literature on both public opinion of intercollegiate athletics and

concerns expressed by higher education administrators (Knight Commission, 2006; Taylor et al., 2011).

A second contradiction voiced by trustees related to their overall perspectives on intercollegiate athletic governance. While trustees predominantly articulated a considerable level of confidence in athletic governance and institutional leadership, they concurrently revealed a lack of understanding of their institutional governance structures, with particular inattention paid to faculty roles. Similarly, a trust in executive leadership to appropriately manage athletics was paired with a preoccupation on scandals in intercollegiate athletics and the correlated risk to both institutions and trustees themselves.

The study suggests that the manner in which a governing board operating as stakeholders and contributing to the shared governance of athletics will vary, in some cases dramatically. As stated in Chapter Two, the definition of stakeholders for this study was groups or individuals that affect organizational achievement or are affected by organizational achievement (Freeman & Reed, 1983), which included individuals involved in athletic governance such as trustees, athletic administrators, presidents, faculty, students, and donors. This study demonstrated that the important question is not whether governing boards are stakeholders that affect or are affected by the institutional governance of intercollegiate athletics, but instead how they should be involved in this governance structure.

In attempting to answer the question of how governing boards are appropriately interwoven into athletic governance, the findings indicate that there are strengths and weaknesses built into the various models of board oversight of

intercollegiate athletics. For example, whether a board has a committee on athletics depends on a variety of factors, including whether the existing committee structure can manage athletic issues, historical problems that have caused a board to be concerned about athletic oversight, or apprehensions about the administrative leadership in this area. The study also suggests that the type of institution may be a factor in decisions around committee structure, with nearly all private boards having an athletics committee and fewer than half of public boards having a committee, likely due to private boards delegating more likely to delegate issues to committees (AGB, 2010b; AGB, 2010c).

The involvement of boards in athletic personnel decisions including coaching searches and contract approvals was another area in which a variety of approaches were identified in the study. The policies and practices regarding approval authority ranged from trustees contributing to decisions on coaches that need to be dismissed and the pool of candidates for replacement, to boards explicitly asking to not be included in any consultation regarding athletic personnel decisions. When weighing their involvement in personnel decisions, boards must ask whether acting as a formal stakeholder ensures appropriate high level oversight or endangers the board by creating the appearance of micromanagement and the opportunity for the board to assume blame if a hiring decision goes awry.

The interview questions on governance structure and board authority for athletic decision-making led to a discussion with trustees about the relative significance of formal governance mechanisms versus informal consultation.

Upon being asked about their opinions on this subject, a majority of trustees observed that informal consultation trumps formal governance when it comes to intercollegiate athletics. The findings suggest a level of support among trustees for Birnbaum's (2004) conclusion that "soft" governance, or the connections and interactions that happen outside of the formal system, produce greater results than "hard" governance, or organizational structures, policies, and procedures that define authority. A repeated theme voiced by trustees, even those that put greater value on formal governance mechanisms, was the expectation that they be kept informed on issues in athletics, particularly those that could have serious ramifications on institutional reputation, such as athletic scandals and high profile personnel decisions. From a governance perspective, although being informed does not necessarily constitute involvement in decision-making, the repeated comments from trustees suggested that information flow is often lacking.

The informal, consultative approach promoted by Birnbaum (2004) is an application of instrumental stakeholder theory, in which stakeholders are viewed as "means" of governance rather than "ends" in decision-making (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Jones, 1995; Letza et al., 2004). Rather than a formal board decision on an athletics matter being the end result of the governance process, the informal consultation acts as the means for the board fulfilling a stakeholder governance role. Greenwood and Van Buren (2010) critique of this approach to governance by arguing that trustees are beholden to the trustworthiness of other organizational actors to engage them in consultation, thereby ensuring a passive rather than active stakeholder role. Therefore, it is appropriate to inquire whether



a reliance on the consultative approach often associated with shared governance in higher education leads to trustees and boards fulfilling an effective stakeholder role.

The judgment of how effective a board fulfills a stakeholder role in the governance of intercollegiate athletics, which occurred when trustees expressed a satisfaction with not only their roles but the manner in which the board was interwoven into institutional decision-making regarding athletics, appeared to be derived from the internal governance culture of the board and the related confidence in institutional leadership. For example, it was clearly conveyed by some trustees that a consultative governance culture in which the president would provide timely, informal updates on athletic matters yielded sufficient opportunity for the board to learn about the issues, offer input on potential actions, and determine whether formal board involvement was needed. The suggestion was that these trustees trusted their presidents to involve the board when necessary. On the other hand, multiple trustees conveyed frustrations about a lack of consultation on athletic issues, which ultimately led to requests for more formal involvement by the board. The difference in these two approaches provides a level of substantiation to Greenwood and Van Buren's (2010) contention that effective stakeholder governance is dependent upon the actions of organizational participants towards each other, thereby lessening the importance of implementing a specific formal governance structure.

The findings related to athletic committees and formal versus informal governance suggests that the experience of being a trustee of a private board can

be a much different experience than that of a public board, whether single institution, system, or statewide coordinating. Although the sample size is limited, the findings showed that the private boards involved in the study were more likely to implement the formal structure of an athletics committee to provide oversight to intercollegiate athletics. The discussion around this topic suggested that private board trustees might place greater significance on formal governance mechanisms than informal consultation. One inference from these results might be that public conversations on intercollegiate athletics are challenging due to the massive public interest in college sports, particularly when factoring in that an overemphasis on athletics sometimes creates a rift between the academic community and the administration.

Jones (1995) asserted that an important component of the stakeholder model of governance is the establishment of a culture of trust and responsibility among all of the stakeholders involved in an organization. Given the unique challenges that are imposed on presidents in managing intercollegiate athletics and on trustees in upholding their fiduciary responsibility in this area, the development of trust between the various stakeholders was clearly an important theme communicated by trustees. A comment by trustee number 27 emphasized the importance of trust between the president and the board by stating:

The relationship is very important, because if the board sees athletics one way and the president sees it another, that's a recipe for major conflict. So rapport, communication, and mutual understanding is really critical for the

success of the board, success of the administration, and success of the athletic program.

This comment and others by trustees seemed to indicate that the implementation of a culture in which expectations are clearly developed and ultimately followed around stakeholder roles is equally, if not more, important than whether a board has an athletics committee or approves coaching contracts.

The development of a culture of trust and responsibility can be fostered in a myriad of ways and is clearly dependent on environmental factors for each board and each institution. For example, private boards with a significant number of members often delegate significant authority to existing standing committees. For some private boards, the existence of an athletics committee and substantial involvement by the administration in the work of the committee might be sufficient to engender the trust of the board as a whole that proper attention is being paid to athletics. On the contrary, the development of a culture of trust for a board elected by the public expected to provide oversight on all major institutional decisions, including those associated with intercollegiate athletics, may require that formal decisions involve the entire board.

Despite trustees conveying a relative level of comfort with the internal governance of intercollegiate athletics at their own institutions, partially due to the development of a culture of trust among stakeholders, the challenges voiced by trustees dealt with issues more externally driven than internally created. The governance without power findings were primarily derived from trustee comments about the inability of internal governance mechanisms to appropriately

manage several areas of modern intercollegiate athletics. Trustees conveyed a sense of frustration in dealing with the influence of the media, the market-driven nature of power coaches and their associated salaries, and the recent movement of institutions between athletic conferences, instigated largely by conference commissioners rather than the institutions themselves (Staples, 2012).

Not only did the study indicate that trustees were challenged by factors at the system level of intercollegiate athletics, an additional commonly voiced theme from trustees was that presidents had a tremendously difficult task in managing the complexities of modern college athletics. Trustees recounted the presidential challenges of dealing with such issues as power coaches and reigning in the escalation of spending. Trustee comments supported the literature, including Hoffman (2013), who discussed the challenges assumed by presidents in this realm by writing:

Efforts by presidents are constrained by a gridiron marketplace characterized by an intensely competitive environment that emphasizes winning and commercial interests....There have been few if any college and university presidents of FBS programs that have been able to individually steer substantive changes at their own institution and only a few have worked collectively to implement new policies. (p. 17)

Granting the challenges assumed by governing boards and presidents in influencing the national dialogue on college athletics and the associated inability of a collective of institutions, either through the NCAA or other structures, to impart legitimate reform, this study illustrated that a stakeholder approach

through institutional shared governance may be limited in dealing with the complexities of intercollegiate athletics.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

From an empirical perspective, this study built upon the work of AGB (2012), which provided the first broad overview of governing board approaches to athletic governance by chronicling such elements as whether boards have a policy on athletics, whether they delegate responsibility for athletics to the chief executive, or whether they have a standing committee on athletics. While the AGB study was a crucial step in understanding the manner in which governing boards provide oversight to athletics, this study provided a first-hand account of trustee viewpoints on governance issues related to intercollegiate athletics. For example, although the AGB study found that a little under half of surveyed governing boards had a standing committee on athletics, there was little context to what that structural governance decision means. On the contrary, this study provided an in-depth exploration of the advantages and risks associated with the existence of an athletics committee as voiced directly by trustees.

An example of a specific empirical observation from this study was the documentation that trustees believe an informal culture of trust between boards and presidents is equally, if not more, important than formal governance structures and processes. The finding that a majority of trustees identified informal consultation as being more beneficial than formal governance processes is an important empirical contribution to the literature on higher education governance. Another example of empirical evidence contributing to the

understanding of the governance of athletics was the finding that trustees, particular those from non-power conferences, are challenged by the financial needs of supporting Division I athletic departments. The fact that two-thirds of the fifteen non-power conference trustees stated that athletic finances are a primary challenge in providing oversight to athletics provides supporting evidence to the perception that the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” in college athletics remains a significant issue.

The study applied stakeholder theory to an area of organizational governance, higher education governing boards, not previously explored in this context. However, the primary contributions to the literature on stakeholder theory manifested in three primary ways, all associated with limitations to the effectiveness of stakeholder governance. First, the study identified limitations to stakeholder theory when participants either do not understand other stakeholder roles or fail to trust other stakeholders. Second, and most importantly, the implementation of stakeholder theory was found to be a limiting approach to organizational governance when externalities are dominant forces.

Stakeholder theory has primarily been written about in the context of corporations, with minimal attention paid to nonprofit organizations, such as colleges and universities, which include neither the clear goal of profitability nor owners in the traditional sense of shareholders (Speckbacher, 2008). However, there has been a great deal written about the manifestation of stakeholder governance in higher education. The predominant approach to in this realm is known as shared governance, which is described as a tri-partite system in which

governing boards, administrators, and the faculty have defined roles in institutional decision-making (AAUP, 1967; Gayle et al., 2003; Rhodes, 2001; Simplicio, 2006).

This study is unique in that stakeholder theory is explored in relation to a stakeholder group in higher education, governing boards, that have ultimate institutional fiduciary responsibility, yet lack explicit authority regarding the management of the high profile area of intercollegiate athletics (AGB, 2004; AGB, 2007). When applied to intercollegiate athletics, shared governance typically has entailed presidents maintaining authority to manage the athletic department and faculty being tasked with assuring the integrity of student-athlete academic programs (AGB, 2007; Bailey & Littlejohn, 1992; Brand, 2007; NCAA, 1998). Despite governing boards not universally fulfilling a specific role in the governance of athletics, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that trustees are interested stakeholders that desire involvement, sometimes through formal governance structures and other times through norms of informal consultation.

Despite the recognition that trustees are interested stakeholders, the study suggests that there are conditional elements to boards effectively engaging in the stakeholder governance of intercollegiate athletics. An important contribution to the literature on stakeholder theory is the observation of the deficiencies of a stakeholder model of governance when participants do not trust other stakeholders. A level of comfort with the delegation of authority to institutional presidents for the operational management of athletics was consistently conveyed

by trustees, thereby displaying a level of trust in administrative leadership to deal with the complex issues associated with modern college athletics. The recognition that presidents manage athletics was associated with trustees from all types of governing boards and among boards that had formal mechanisms of athletic governance and those that did not.

However, multiple trustees commented that a lack of communication on athletic issues led to a deficiency of trust in their presidents to effectively manage athletics. This perception came both in situations where boards had committees devoted to athletics and among those that did not. In two cases, trustees observed that a frustration about communication and consultation on athletic issues led to their boards creating formal structures to deal with athletics, either through a committee or by appointing an athletic liaison. Another trustee who served on an athletic committee expressed concern about the lack of consultation on athletic decision-making, thereby indicating that formal structures are not a panacea for effective stakeholder governance.

The study suggests that some trustees identified the development of a culture of trustworthiness to be of greater importance to stakeholder governance than the formal processes of organizational decision-making. Greenwood and Van Buren (2010) devoted considerable attention to the concept of organizational trustworthiness and the effect on stakeholder relationships, maintaining that the manner in which organizations respond to stakeholder trust is crucial to organizational effectiveness. This study goes beyond the analysis of Greenwood and Van Buren (2010), which focused on the relationship between organizations



and dependent stakeholders who have limited power, by determining that a culture of trustworthiness is important both from stakeholders at the top and bottom of organizational power, as well as between stakeholders with a similar level of power.

The study also indicates that certain actions may be taken when stakeholder trust breaks down. In multiple situations, trustees discussed the implementation of formal governance structures to remedy a trust deficiency due to presidents inadequately communicating on athletic issues. Indeed, governing boards have the authority to develop governance structures and determine their role in institutional decision-making, but the fact that multiple boards chose formal responses rather than informal consultation is an important finding. This indicates that assertion of formal stakeholder roles may be the standard response when stakeholder governance breaks down. A culture of informal consultation is therefore more characteristic of effective governance structures and may not be a typical response for improving trust deficits.

A lack of understanding of stakeholder roles in the governance of athletics is as notable as the deficiency of trust. Trustees generally expressed little understanding of other athletic governance roles, particularly displaying an ignorance of the roles of faculty members. This particular stakeholder role is important because faculty are entrusted in athletic governance with maintaining the integrity and standards of the academic programs associated with student-athletes (Bailey & Littlejohn, 1991; Brand, 2007; Cooper, 1992).

There has been attention paid to the importance of recognizing all stakeholder roles in implementing effective governance (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hasnas, 2013). Hasnas (2013) argued that leaders must distribute stakeholder value throughout the organization. Donaldson and Preston (1995) similarly observed that managers within an organization have the responsibility to provide resources for and receive benefits from all legitimate stakeholders. The study observed a general failure to recognize the legitimacy of faculty as stakeholders in the governance of athletics. This finding was exemplified by the observations of two trustees, both prominent in dealing with athletic issues, who commented on faculty roles without acknowledging their role or importance.

The unique contribution to the literature on stakeholder theory was that trustees not only failed to respect the legitimacy of faculty roles in the governance of athletics, there was a near complete ignorance by trustees of the faculty presence as stakeholders. While approximately one third of trustees mentioned faculty in some capacity, only one trustee substantively discussed faculty roles in regard to athletics. This finding demonstrates contradictions with other trustee comments regarding the importance placed on the academic performance of student-athletes. Multiple trustees, primarily when describing the responsibilities of their athletic committees, noted the board's role in ensuring the integrity of student-athlete academic performance. While an athletic committee or other board mechanism may certainly have procedures for monitoring the performance of student-athletes, it is quite remarkable that trustees repeatedly failed to

acknowledge the authority for student-athlete academic integrity typically granted to institutional faculty (Bailey & Littlejohn, 1991; Brand, 2007; Cooper, 1992).

This leads to a question as to whether stakeholder governance can be effectively implemented when key stakeholders lack understanding of or are ignorant or disrespectful of other stakeholder roles. The foundation of stakeholder governance, as discussed in Chapter Two, is that this system works well when all of those individuals or groups who have a “stake” in the actions of an organization are able to contribute to organizational decision-making and receive value from mission-related activities (Kangas, 2011). Not only does the ignorance of faculty involvement display a deficiency of respect for their important stakeholder role in athletic governance, there is the related concern that the lack of understanding could lead to ineffective governance decisions. In the same way that a trust deficit between trustees and the president may lead to a board creating new formal structures to enhance athletic oversight, an ignorance of faculty roles could lead to boards being overly engaged in the academic matters of the athletic department, which conventionally is the responsibility of the faculty.

A particularly notable contribution to the literature on stakeholder theory is recognition that a stakeholder governance model may be compromised in dealing with powers external to organizations. The majority of this study focused on the structures, processes, policies, and culture surrounding decision-making internal to institutions in order to assess the effectiveness of a stakeholder approach to athletic governance. Specifically, the study focused on formal

governance mechanisms such as athletics committees, approval authorities, and informal norms related to presidential consultation on issues of importance. Despite the varying ways that governing boards implement these formal and informal processes and the spectrum of trustee viewpoints on the implementation, it can be concluded that boards are able to contribute as stakeholders to the shared governance of athletics when applied to internal oversight.

Where the fulfillment of a stakeholder role by governing boards in the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics may fall short is regarding systemic, national issues in college sports. This is illustrated by the study's findings on trustees expressing a sense of powerlessness related to certain aspects of athletic governance. For example, trustees from non-power conferences conveyed frustrations with an ongoing process of trying to maintain a financial pace with power conference programs. Despite the interviews being conducted prior to recent NCAA governance changes allowing for institutions to pay full cost of attendance for student-athletes (Terlep, 2015), some non-power conference trustees acknowledged that decisions made by power conference institutions would undeniably affect how they approached their situations. Other external influences cited by trustees included the power that television networks have in determining football schedules and the market-driven nature of coaching contracts that put boards and institutions in an extremely ineffectual bargaining position.

Another specific issue highlighting the challenges of external influences cited by several trustees was the recent wave of conference realignment (Forde, 2013). Aside from one example of a governing board that actively inserted itself

into the decision-making process, the trustees from institutions that had recently switched conferences conveyed that they either had no role or a limited consultative role in conference affiliation decisions. The general belief is that decisions were made by conference commissioners, who typically work at the behest of conference member presidents, based on economic factors such as revenue from television rights (Lavigne, 2014; Thamel, 2011). Despite the necessary approval in realignment decisions from the conference boards, comprised of presidents, and ultimately institutional governing boards, trustees noted that the decisions were typically made by the conference commissioners by the time they reached those points of approval.

The aforementioned case of an internal system of shared governance being trumped by external factors is not isolated in higher education to intercollegiate athletics. In recent years, traditional funding sources for public higher education such as state legislatures have increasingly attempted to tie funding to performance-based metrics in such areas as learning outcomes and graduation rates (Dee, 2006; McLendon & Hearn, 2013). At the federal level, President Obama proposed a system by which funding for student aid would be based on a rating system for public and private colleges and universities that measures various outcomes such as graduation rates, affordability, and access for low income students (Jaschik, 2013). Another prominent area of external influence on the policy and practices of colleges and universities has been related to sexual assaults on campuses, with federal legislation introduced in 2014 that would

punish institutions for underreporting or inappropriately dealing with sexual assault cases (Bahr, 2014).

These examples, athletic and otherwise, highlight the fact that governing boards, despite being the ultimate institutional authority at colleges and universities, are sometimes rendered as weak, if not powerless, in certain areas of institutional decision-making. Whether it is a decision on athletic conference affiliation or the need to direct funding to student conduct offices to deal with sexual assault cases, institutions are heavily influenced by externalities. In light of these external influences, it is entirely reasonable to assess whether the traditional governance model of shared responsibilities among several stakeholders remains effective.

Welcomer's (2002) analysis of external influences to organizational stakeholder networks demonstrated that the more an organization was receptive to the interests of external stakeholders, the more likely it was that those stakeholders reciprocated that respect and consideration. Related to this study, stakeholders such as conference commissioners are clearly powerbrokers in college athletics external to governing boards, which would suggest that boards must be receptive to these externalities by acknowledging their power. The importance of receptivity to external stakeholders espoused by Welcomer (2012) is coupled with a guiding principle of stakeholder governance that stakeholders are defined not only by their legitimate interest in an organization, but also by the organization's interest in them (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Therefore, whether the stakeholder relationship involves internal stakeholders or external influences,

the presence of trust, respect, and receptivity to stakeholder interests is paramount and may yield effective governance.

A question emerging from this study is whether the absence of trust and receptivity due to the influence of external stakeholders can be overcome through the implementation of a stakeholder governance model. Despite the fact that the formal role of a governing board in any major decision involving athletics may be limited, be it conference affiliation or the hiring of a head football coach, board trustees ultimately have the ability to dictate the process and terms by which negotiations proceed and agreements are reached. Therefore, presidents, as the primary representative of the organization and subordinate of governing boards, have a decided interest in satisfying the interests of trustees as stakeholders.

Conference affiliation decisions and conference media rights agreements are prime examples of external influence being imposed on institutions and the opportunity for a robust internal response being limited due to the power of such externalities as conference commissioners and television networks. However, those limits on power do not necessarily constitute a condemnation of a stakeholder governance system as much as an indictment of an ineffective shared governance culture. While they may believe that their authority is limited due to external power, boards have the ability to develop the policies, practices, and communication expectations for decision-making that address both internal and external issues. For a board that believes its president is not appropriately sharing information in the midst of conference affiliation negotiations, a request for more informal consultation may be considered. When a board lacks understanding of

media rights agreements, a response may be to request a presentation on the subject at a formal board meeting. Regardless of the issue, an enhanced understanding of subject matter should lead to greater respect for all stakeholders, including external forces, and an improved culture of stakeholder governance.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The following recommendations are directed toward trustees and governing boards as considerations for policy and practice in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics.

**Develop expectations for practice.** While trustees expressed general support for the role of athletics on their campuses, there was considerable concern expressed about the balance between athletics and academics and the potential for scandals such as Penn State. In order to alleviate these concerns, it is critical for boards to engage in dialogue with presidents about which issues require board consultation and which issues the board should be more formally involved. On a transactional basis, boards should set clear expectations about when trustees need to be informed of major coach hiring, firing, and contract negotiations, regardless of whether final approval comes to the board.

As discussed in Chapter Five, several trustees mentioned the Penn State scandal as a cautionary tale for boards. One of the important lessons learned from the aftermath of the scandal is that Penn State administrators repeatedly failed to inform the Board of Trustees of potential sexual abuse incidents (Freeh, 2012). Several universities have created and revised policies to address the specific issue of protecting minors on campuses in the wake of the scandal, but equally



important for boards to consider is the manner in which athletic compliance issues are communicated to trustees, both informally for notification of potential problems and formally as part of regular reporting.

The development of expectations for practice may be particularly helpful in dealing with influences in college athletics that are external to institutions. An example of which that that caused significant consternation for several trustees in recent years has been conference realignment. In particular, trustees discussed the challenges associated with either not being informed of potential conference moves for their institutions or not playing a formal role in final decisions. While conference realignment may continue, of greater significance is the future of the NCAA and the fact that the new governance structure of the organization allows for greater autonomy for the power conference institutions to determine their own rules (NCAA, 2014b). Several trustees expressed hope that their boards would be involved in decisions about institutional positioning and the future of the NCAA. Despite concerns being voiced about the lack of governing board influence in some of these external, systematic issues, trustees need to set clear expectations about board role. Questions that could be posed to the president include, *“Should the president consult with board leadership before and after every conference board meeting?”* or *“Should the board develop an institutional position on the future of NCAA governance?”*

**Be aware of the consequences of formalizing board oversight.** As demonstrated by the trustee interviews, there was no consensus on whether boards should have a standing athletics committee or approve coaching contracts.

Athletic committees, for example, were assessed as providing an important opportunity for trustees to formally discuss athletic issues while at the same time creating opportunities for micromanagement and boosterism. In this study, two trustees from the same private board, one on the athletics committee and one not, held different viewpoints on the effectiveness of the committee. Trustees need to assess on a regular basis whether athletic issues can effectively be handled by other board committees or whether there are any deleterious effects of having a committee. Of particular importance is the assessment of whether an athletics committee is not reflective of a stakeholder approach to governance due to the fact that those trustees not serving on the committee are not able to contribute as stakeholders to the oversight of athletics.

Formalizing board oversight through explicit board authority on athletic items or board committee structure can also have the undesired effect of undermining presidential control of intercollegiate athletics. Ensuring that presidents have complete authority to manage institutional athletic departments should be at the forefront of board activity related to intercollegiate athletics and any board activity that might call this into question should be evaluated. For example, boards that have official liaisons to the athletic department must take great care to ensure that administrative reporting lines are not weakened or confused.

**Focus on core board responsibilities.** Chapter Two highlighted such critical board responsibilities as determining institutional mission and ensuring financial solvency. As governing boards weigh the manner in which they should

provide oversight to intercollegiate athletics, focusing on these typical board responsibilities is essential. Multiple trustees acknowledged that athletics is a realm of higher education that is very easy for boards to step over the line from governance to management. Every time the board examines an area of intercollegiate athletics, trustees must ask whether the focus is at the right level. Regarding the traditional academic mission of colleges and universities, governing boards should examine whether intercollegiate athletics is operating in accordance with that mission, particularly through annual reporting of such elements as student-athlete academic performance and compliance with NCAA rules and federal gender equity laws.

The challenges associated with financial sustainability of Division I athletic departments were clearly an important consideration of several trustees in this study. Governing boards must be included in the discussion around the financial solvency of intercollegiate athletics, particularly when considering that very few NCAA Division I athletic departments are able to operate at a profit. Governing boards should not necessarily spend time on the details of the athletic budget, but they should fulfill their fiduciary responsibility by engaging presidents on the acceptability of institutional subsidies and long term financial planning for athletics.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is aimed to provide an enhanced understanding of the manner in which governing boards participate as stakeholders in the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics, thereby contributing to the literature on stakeholder

theory and higher education governance. However, there clearly were limitations to the methods utilized in the study. The following will elaborate on the shortcomings of the sample development and the inherent weakness relating to meeting the standard of creditability.

The strength of this study was the use of unfiltered, first-hand accounts of the participating trustees. However, due to the fact that the process for recruiting interviewees involved using formal gatekeepers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) by querying board professionals for potential participants, those board professionals utilized bias in concluding which trustees would be most willing to participate and provide informative responses. Despite the fact that the recruitment communication (see Appendix B) included the following language, *“I am not looking for any particular set of viewpoints on athletics, but just individuals who you think would have interesting thoughts on the subject,”* patterns developed in the profile of trustees offered as willing participants. Board professionals tended to provide the names of trustees who either served on an athletics committee or had an interest in intercollegiate athletics. In addition, the sample was overwhelmingly male with only three females interviewed out of a sample size of 29.

The limitations associated with trustee recruitment lead to the conclusion that the sample captures neither the diversity of trustee viewpoints on intercollegiate athletics nor the breadth of knowledge among trustees on this subject. For example, the majority of trustees conveyed a general understanding of national and institutional issues surrounding intercollegiate athletics and

expressed a level of comfort with the role of athletics on their campuses. Given the national dialogue and associated concern about such issues as student-athlete compensation, concussions, and power conference autonomy, trustees devoted considerably scant attention to expressing concerns about the future of college athletics and what that would mean to their campuses.

In reflecting on the use of board professionals as formal gatekeepers to potential interview subjects, I maintain that this was the most appropriate, and likely to succeed, manner of recruiting trustees. In my experience, governing board members place a great deal of trust in board professionals to help them sort out professional requests for their time and experience. However, the focus on recruiting a sufficient sample size made me reluctant to challenge recommendations of willing participants and ask for different profiles. While I certainly could not have known in advance the viewpoints of potential interview subjects, I could have negotiated with some board professionals about finding trustees who had less direct experience with athletics on their governing boards.

A second limitation of the study resulted from the need to maintain complete confidentiality for participating trustees through no attribution of institutional or personal names. I came to the conclusion that confidentiality would be required through my completion of the pilot study in which participants asked for assurance of confidentiality and my general experience in working with the very public nature of governing board membership. Therefore, I assured all potential interviewees that there would be no attribution in the final document. I also made the determination that redacting institutional and personal names from

the transcripts would not yield an acceptable level of confidentiality due to the potential attribution of publicly known issues being described. Therefore, the possibility of peer review of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was deemed not acceptable for this study. Despite inclusion of a member-checking (Bailey, 2007; Boeije, 2010; Seidman, 1991) process that presented the findings to the study participants, the absence of an external review of the data clearly affected meeting the standard of credibility.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

To address the limitation posed by utilizing formalized gatekeepers (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), a recommendation for further research would be a qualitative study on a single board in which either all or the majority of trustees were interviewed to examine the manner in which the full board viewed the governance of intercollegiate athletics. This current study provided a micro version of this proposed approach with several pairs of trustees representing the same board. These trustees expressed opposing viewpoints on a host of subjects, including the effectiveness of the athletics committee and the role of the board in conference realignment decisions. An in-depth study of a single board would potentially expand on these differences of opinion and provide a more thorough examination of the manner in which a full board wades through the complex world of intercollegiate athletics.

A second recommendation for further research would be an examination of whether governing board involvement in intercollegiate athletic issues differs from that of other areas of board governance. For example, would trustees have a

different perspective on board involvement in hiring a football coach than that of vice presidents? Would there be a differing level of interest in the financing and construction of a research building and a basketball arena? A qualitative comparison study undertaken in this manner could provide important information on whether athletics truly is a unique component of higher education as it typically is portrayed.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study examined the stakeholder role of higher education governing boards in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics contributed to the literature on higher education and organizational governance by providing the opportunity for trustees to offer their perspectives on athletics, which previously had not been documented. Theoretically, the study explored the implementation of organizational stakeholder theory in higher education, known as shared governance, providing both confirmation of the importance of a culture of trust and communication to effective implementation, along with a critical assessment of the efficacy of this approach when applied to the governance of intercollegiate athletics due to the power of external factors. Finally, the study offered recommendations for policy and practice, observing that boards must develop expectations for how they work with administrators in this area, assess the risks of formalizing board oversight, and focus on core board governance responsibilities.

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## APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **Interviewer Script:**

This study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Minnesota. The purpose of this study is to provide trustees the opportunity to discuss their viewpoints on intercollegiate athletics and to examine the manner in which governing boards contribute to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics.

This interview will provide you the opportunity to express your experience as being a trustee in dealing with athletics at your institution and your feelings about intercollegiate athletics' place in higher education.

Your privacy and confidentiality will not be compromised through your participation in this study. No personal or institutional names will be included in the dissertation study. I will be the only person to listen to or transcribe the interview. You will have final approval over the transcription, and I will be only other person to view the transcription. The data will be stored on my personal computer with no personal identifying marks for each interview.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may discontinue your participation in the study at any point.

Do you consent to participate in this study?

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### **QUESTIONS**

#### **Background/Demographic Information**

- Tell me about your experience on the board?
  - How long you have served
  - Leadership positions
  - Committee assignments
- Describe your board?
  - Appointment process for members and their terms
  - Number of members
  - How often you meet
- Describe the institution or institutions you govern?
  - Public / private
  - Comprehensive research / liberal arts

- Level of NCAA competition

### **Institutional Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics**

1. What are your general views on intercollegiate athletics?
  - National perspective
  - Student-athlete or participant in sports while in school
  - Fan of college sports
  - How your views have changed since becoming a trustee
2. What is the appropriate role of intercollegiate athletics on your campus or campuses?
  - Front-porch analogy / way to access the institution
  - Incorporated appropriately into institutional mission
3. What role does the board play in governing intercollegiate athletics at your institution?
  - Athletics committee
  - Athletics policy
  - Formal reports
  - Approval authority / contracts
4. How should intercollegiate athletics be governed at your institution?
  - Chief executive role
  - Involvement of the faculty
  - Independence of the athletic department
5. What role should the board play?
  - Formal and informal
  - Consultation with the chief executive
6. What are the challenges experienced by the board in the governance of intercollegiate athletics at your institution?
  - Athletic finances
  - Coaching contracts
  - Trustees as boosters
  - Major revenue sports



## APPENDIX B – RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Selected board professionals received the following email regarding potential trustee participation in the study:

Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Jon Steadland and I am a staff member in the Office of the President and a Ph.D. student at the University of Minnesota. I am currently beginning a dissertation project on the role of governing boards in providing oversight to intercollegiate athletics. While this subject has gained great attention in recent years, most recently with a report released last fall by the Association of Governing Boards, the goal of my research is to talk directly with board members from different institutions around the country regarding their viewpoints on how athletics is governed at their institution. I believe that this study will allow for an in-depth exploration of athletic governance to contribute to our understanding of how boards deal with this issue.

The subjects of my proposed study are board members from Division I institutions, public and private. I am inquiring whether there might be a member of the University of \_\_\_\_\_ Board of Trustees that would be willing to do an approximately 30-45 minute phone interview on this subject at some point in the near future. The interviews and resulting dissertation will be entirely confidential and will not involve attribution of any personal or institutional names. I am not looking for any particular set of viewpoints on athletics, but just individuals who you think would have interesting thoughts on the subject.

If you think this might be a possibility or have additional questions, I would be interested in having a phone conversation or additional email correspondence to explore this further.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,  
Jon Steadland

## APPENDIX C – INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The following form was sent to potential participants prior to their participation in the study:

### **CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET** **Higher Education Governing Boards and Stakeholder Governance of** **Intercollegiate Athletics**

You are invited to be in a research study on the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a trustee of a governing board that oversees one or more NCAA Division I institutions..

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: *Jon Steadland, Ph.D. Candidate, School of Kinesiology, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.*

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: provide trustees of higher education governing boards the opportunity to discuss their viewpoints on intercollegiate athletics and to examine the manner in which governing boards contribute to the shared governance of intercollegiate athletics.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participate in a phone interview and provide final approval of the interview transcript.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

There are no identified risks to your participation in this study.

The benefits to participation are the opportunity to contribute to the academic understanding of intercollegiate athletic governance.

#### **Compensation:**

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In the dissertation, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject, including personal or institutional names. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you

decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is: Jon Steadland. You may ask any questions by contacting me at 612-839-3222 or [jsteadla@umn.edu](mailto:jsteadla@umn.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***